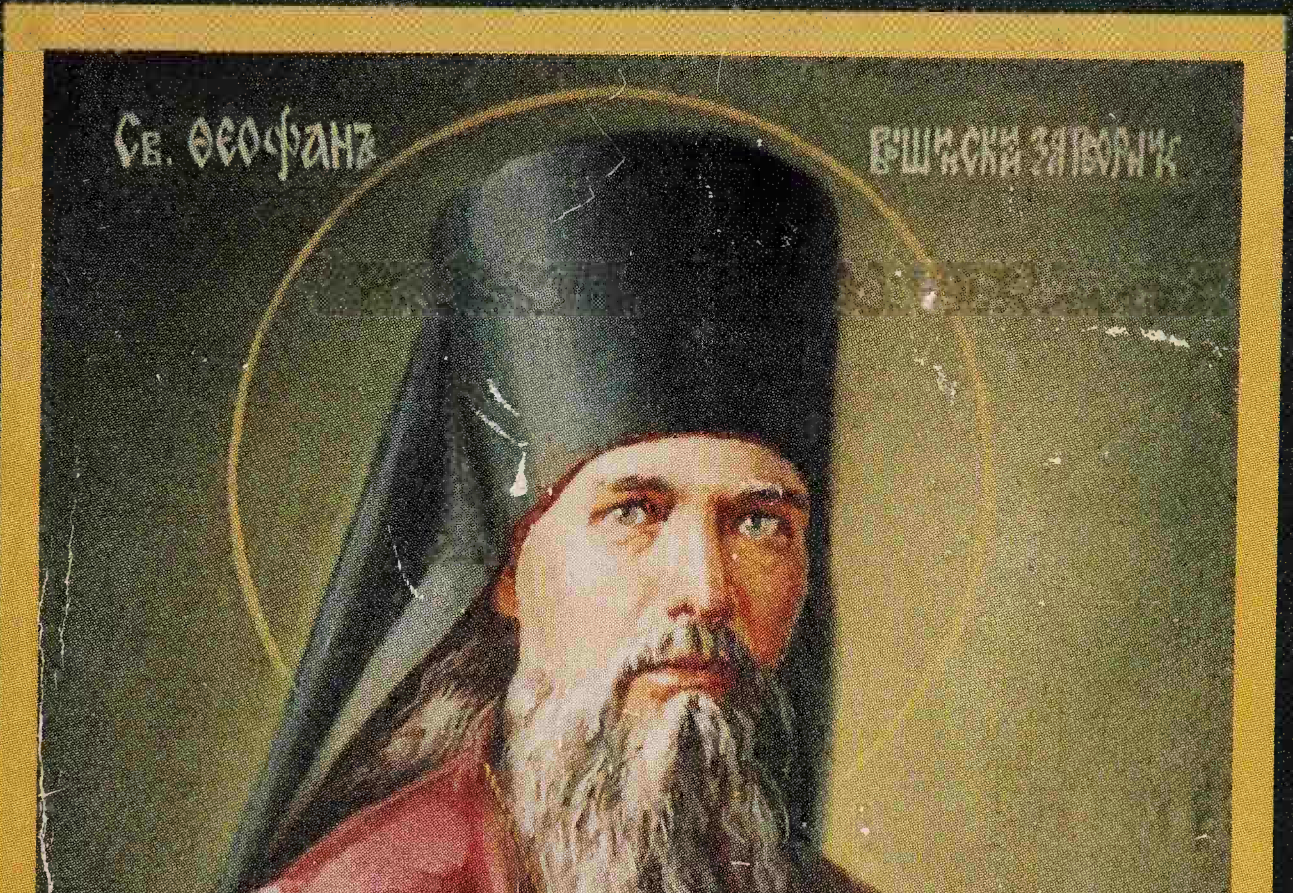
The Spiritual Life

AND HOW TO BE ATTUNED TO IT


Св. Ѳеофанъ
Вышенскій Затворникъ

BY ST. THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

The famed classic of Russian Spirituality:
A study in the Science of the Soul

Boston
Public Library

Purchased From
Billings Fund

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE
AND HOW TO BE ATTUNED TO IT

ST. THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE
(1815-1894)

The Spiritual Life

AND HOW TO BE ATTUNED TO IT

by ST. THEOPHAN the RECLUSE

Translated by Alexandra Dockham

ST. HERMAN OF ALASKA BROTHERHOOD
St. Paisius Abbey
1995

BX382
.F465
1995

†

Copyright 1995 by
St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood

Translated by Alexandra Dockham

Address all correspondence to:
St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood
P.O. Box 70, Platina, California 96076

and

St. Paisius Abbey
P.O. Box 130, 7777 Martinelli Road
Forestville, California 95436

Front cover: Icon of St. Theophan at Vysha Convent

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Feofan, Saint, Bishop of Tambov and Shatsk, 1815-1894.
The Spiritual Life and How to Be Attuned To It
Translated from the Russian.
1. Christianity–Eastern Orthodox Spirituality. 2. Christianity—Spiritual Instruction.
I. Title

Library of Congress Catalog Number: 94-80139
ISBN: 0-938635-36-0

Contents

Preface *by Abbot Herman* 9
Introduction *by Fr. Philip Tolbert* 25
1. The Subject of Our Correspondence: The Spiritual Life 33
2. Vanity of Worldly Life 34
3. Emptiness 36
4. Spiritual Freedom or Spiritual Slavery 39
5. The Life of the Body 45
6. The Life of the Soul: The Intellectual Aspect 48
7. The Life of the Soul: The Desirous Aspect 53
8. The Heart and the Aspect of Sense 56
9. Spiritual Life 60
10. Faith in the Existence of God 64
11. The Influence of the Spirit on the Soul 66
12. The Supremacy of Spiritual Life 71
13. Life According to the Spirit 76
14. The Covering of the Soul 81
15. How the Saints Hear Our Prayers 84
16. The True Goal of Life 87
17. A God-pleasing Life 91
18. The One Thing Needful 95
19. Ancestral Sin 99
20. The Disturbance in the Nature of Man 101
21. The Necessity of Union with God 106

22. The Redemptive Uplifting of Fallen Man 110
23. True Spiritual Zeal 115
24. Renewal and Self-Cleansing 119
25. The Hidden Action of Grace 121
26. The Activity of Grace 124
27. Inner Concentration 128
28. Examples of the Free Resolve to Live According to Grace 133
29. Patience and Constancy 137
30. The Inner State According to Macarius the Great . 140
31. Supporting This Initial Yearning 145
32. *Govenie*: The Path of a Virtuous Life 149
33. *Govenie* and Conduct at Home 153
34. Preparation for Confession 156
35. The Disposition of One's Heart 160
36. The Mystery of Repentance and Communion . . . 164
37. Harmony with the Will of God 169
38. A Conscious Renewal of the Vows Given at Baptism 173
39. How the Enemy Tries to Lead One Astray 175
40. Various Causes of Spiritual Cooling 178
41. Final Counsels Before Confession and Communion 182
42. Unceasing Remembrance of God 186
43. Inner Peace 189
44. Warnings to One on the True Path 194
45. Undistracted Prayer 198
46. General Rules for Staying on the True Path 201
47. A Prayer Rule 204
48. How to Attain Undistracted Prayer 209
49. The Burdens of Life 213
50. Arousing in Oneself Unceasing Remembrance of God 216

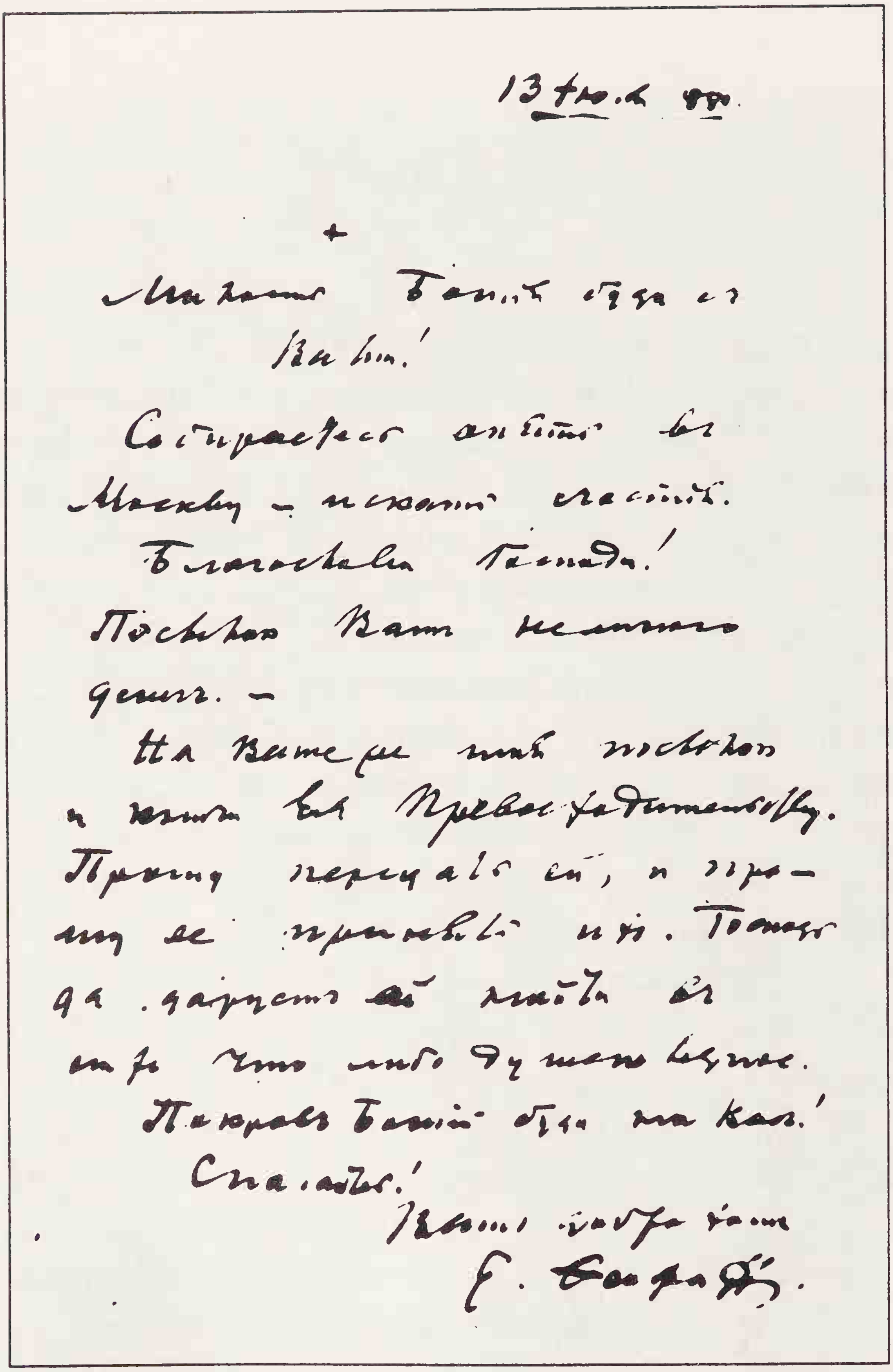
51. Turning the Burdens of Life to Spiritual Profit . . . 219
52. Burning Love for God 222
53. Passions as an Obstacle to the Spirit 224
54. Warfare with the Passions 227
55. More About Warfare with the Passions 230
56. The Slightest Movements of the Passions 233
57. Stages in the Development of Passions 237
58. Prayer in the Warfare with Passionate Thoughts . . 244
59. St. Hesychius on Warfare with the Passions 249
60. Cleansing the Heart 254
61. Guarding the Hearing and Sight 257
62. Active Warfare with the Passions 260
63. Singing and Music 262
64. Solitude 265
65. St. Poemen on the God-pleasing Life 267
66. A Journey to the St. Sergius Lavra 272
67. Diligent Confession 275
68. The Need of a Good Counselor 277
69. Depression and Fear 280
70. On the Reading of Spiritual and Secular Books . . . 284
71. On Coldness in Prayer 287
72. The Vow of Renunciation of the World 290
73. The Vow of Chastity 292
74. Yearning for Monastic Life 296
75. The Tricks of the Enemy 298
76. Temptations from Unbelievers 301
77. Obedience to Parents 305
78. Injustice and False Accusation 307
79. Final Anxieties and Disturbances 311
80. Rest After a Storm 314

St. Theophan in later years.

Preface

During the last century the influence of St. Theophan the Recluse upon the Orthodox Christian world has been quite pronounced. He gathered patristic teaching especially from St. Tikhon of Zadonsk and St. Paisius Velichkovsky—those two pillars who initiated a virtual rebirth of Russian spirituality—and he poured it out in a flood of spiritual wisdom, which finally reached American shores at the end of Holy Russia's millennium. St. Theophan has been known in all of Orthodoxy as a recluse-missionary. His rare degree of patristic scholarship, combined with his thorough understanding of the soul of his native Russia and of contemporary people in general, enabled him to carve out a genuine understanding of spirituality for modern man. He made this understanding accessible to the mentality of the average person, for he knew that each "average person" is the possessor of an immortal soul, and that each soul is to be attuned here upon this earth to live eternally with God in Paradise. Truly a benefactor to the fallen human race, St. Theophan earned his place among the Saints of Russia, and his sanctity is now universally proclaimed.

Among St. Theophan's many writings is the book which the reader now holds in his hands. Known as a "manual" on how to acquire spiritual life, this book was the result of the correspondence between a young lady of the upper middle class and our recluse. The story that has been passed down to us is as follows:



13 февр. 88.

+

Милость Божія буди съ
Вами!

Собираетесь опять въ
Москву — [illegible] [illegible].
Благослови Господи!
Посылаю Вамъ немного
денегъ. —
На Ваше же имя посылаю
и книжку къ Превосходительству.
Прошу передать ей, и прошу же принять ихъ. Господь
да даруетъ ей [illegible] въ
нихъ что либо душеполезное.
Покровъ Божій буди на Васъ!
Спасайтесь!
Вашъ доброхотъ
Е. Ѳеофанъ.

An original letter of St. Theophan from 1888; an example of the letters he wrote to the young lady from whose collection this volume was compiled.

Bishop Theophan in his younger years
at his desk writing letters.

Once, in the middle of the dance floor at some annual ball, the young lady had a sudden glimpse of the immortality of the soul, and as this vision flashed upon her inward eye, she was struck with the thought that all this swirling around the dance floor was utterly futile. Amazed and disturbed, she wrote to the recluse: "Is this normal, or is it a morbid hindrance to a desire for a happy life in the world?" The answer to her question evoked a correspondance which resulted in this volume. The correspondence ended with her sitting in a monastic cell, already a nun, before a window that opened onto a cloistered garden, where a songbird was flying in and out, a visitor from heaven and a symbol of spiritual freedom.

St. Theophan strove to make sure that the young soul of his correspondent would not only be familiar with the principles of spiritual life, but would first of all be able to keenly hear the right "tone" of spiritual life. He attuned her soul to that tone, like an instrument to a pitch, in a way natural to her personality. He helped her first of all hear the movement of her spirit, and only then, using the instrument of her soul, did he help her to hearken to the Spirit of God which "bloweth where it listeth" (John 3:8).

This tuning of the soul is necessary so that the soul will be in harmony with the voice of God's Providence echoing in the instrument of the heart. Therefore this book could be rightly called a primer to be used before embarking into the realm of spiritual life.

All this I gathered from my spiritual father, Fr. Adrian [Rymarenko], who was a great admirer of St. Theophan. In Russia, Fr. Adrian had been a disciple of Optina Elders Nektary and Anatole, who in turn had directed him to our celebrated recluse-writer. To illustrate how this book saves souls, Fr. Adrian gave me the following example of a holy monk he had known:

"Fr. Vincent was born in Petersburg in a well-to-do clerk's family by the name of Nikolsky. He completed law school and became interested in philosophy—to such an extent that it gripped his thoughts and feelings. At that time he was far from Christ and His Church. Just then one of his brothers died unexpectedly. This had a profound effect on his life. The first thing that came to his mind was to commit suicide. He was studying Neitzsche, who, in a sense, whispered this idea into his ear. The only thing holding him back was his love for his mother. He wanted to prepare her for his planned death, and thus he secretly left home and hid on his family's estate, where during wintertime no one lived. His parents, however, found out where he was and sent an old relative, a nun, to him. On the table in the room where Fr. Vincent was hiding, this nun, as if by accident, left a book by Bishop Theophan the Recluse: *The Spiritual Life and How to Be Attuned to It.* Fr. Vincent read this book and with enthusiasm began to read the other writings of Bishop Theophan. Soon he became acquainted with the Archbishop of Tula and Belyov, Parthenius (Levitsky), whom he later remembered with special gratitude, considering him an ascetic and a truly humble monk. Archbishop Parthenius directed him to Optina Monastery.

"Fr. Vincent came to Optina when Archimandrite Xenophont was the abbot. His first monastic obediences were working in the kitchen and reading out loud the monastic rule to the already sick Archimandrite Xenophont. The guidance of his spiritual life was in the hands of Fr. Nektary who, after the repose of Elder Joseph, was selected to be the monastery elder and the spiritual father of all the brethren. Fr. Nektary was a practitioner of the Jesus Prayer, having been taught it by the great Elder Anatole (Zertsalov) of Optina. The mental activity of the Jesus Prayer—wherein one acquires the habit of walking in the remembrance of the Name of God—set the tone for the rest of Fr. Vincent's life. This inward activity became the determining factor for everything. All external things were viewed from this all-encompassing, spiritually refined way of life. Nothing else in his life interested him. He had only one aim—to abide in the Name of the Lord. He was always filled with joy. He encountered no difficulty in the monastery obediences since his main task was the acquisition of spiritual sobriety. He worked in the bread bakery, in the prosphora (holy bread) bakery, and in the office. Much to his liking, he was often sent to get the mail. From the monastery to the post-office in Kozelsk was almost four miles. These eight miles (there and back) were filled with great joy, for during this time he fulfilled his obedience to his elder concerning sobriety and prayer.

"During this period of his life the Revolution occurred. The young monk did not wish to leave during those first difficult years of the Revolution when the monastery was being gradually torn apart. His father, a dignitary, had not wanted him to enter the monastery, and had been very disappointed that his son had thrown away the possibility of rising up in the secular world. In the turbulent years of the Revolution, however, his father wrote him a letter:

"'Fr. Vincent [in such a way did he address his son], how right you were! Oh, how I wish I could change my past life! How I wish that from my youth I had accepted your way of life. I am now dying and, looking towards my grave, I weep. Your unworthy slave of Christ.' This letter of a father to his son gave strength to Fr. Vincent at a time when the wave of the Revolution was destroying monasteries and causing their inhabitants to seek some other shelter. Fr. Vincent did not seek anything. He was, as before, in obedience to his elder and conducted his own spiritual work. At this time Optina Monastery was looking for places to send its monks. Elder Nektary sent Fr. Vincent to me, a parish priest, so that under the protection of our parish church the life of this monk-ascetic might be preserved.

"The Lord enabled us to behold in him a candle burning before God.... It is difficult to say what this monk spent his time doing. I can only say that now I weep, remembering the past. I know that I didn't always know how to cherish this refined and polished vessel of the grace of God.... For the two years he stayed with us, he never went of his own accord outside the gate of the church. Not once did he sit at our trapeza (refectory) table. He never conversed with anyone for the sake of his own interest. He never pushed his own ideas upon anyone. During the whole time he was with us, one could sense in him the power of God.

"The godless authorities, who arrested and sent him away from me, treated him peculiarly. It seemed that they feared his sanctity. He was sent, as I was, on 'administrative exile.' Automatically the thought came to me: how would he survive the approaching trials? Fr. Vincent wrote his elder a letter in the style of a Soviet person. It sounded like nonsense: he asked the elder to bless him to be a pauper. In the Soviet Union there was no place for a pauper. The elder blessed him. I know that the Lord did not abandon his slave. Nor did our parishioners forget him; they sent him parcels of food and other necessary things.

"In 1933 he returned from his first exile and arrived in Kozelsk at the time of the common arrest of the last Optina monks. He was arrested again and exiled to Tashkent. There, in the first month of his exile, according to the authorities, he died from some obscure disease. I know that before he was arrested one of our Kievan monks visited him while he was still in Kozelsk. This monk told me that Fr. Vincent was living in a small cabin that reminded one of a cave. Utter poverty. Deprivation. Yet at that moment he was a rich man—only his riches were not earthly, but heavenly. He was already prepared to die as a monk-martyr.

"Before the final dispersion of the monks, Archimandrite Xenophont of Optina asked Fr. Vincent if he would accept ordination to the priesthood. Fr. Vincent was obedient but told Father Archimandrite that if he would be asked what he desired, then he would reply that he cared to remain a simple monk. Archimandrite Xenophont decided to grant his wish. Thus Fr. Vincent was never ordained; he remained a simple monk his entire life.

"O holy monk-martyr Vincent, pray to God for us."

The outward events of the life of St. Theophan the Recluse (1815-1894), in the world George Govorov, were not unusual for a son of Holy Russia. A pious youth dedicated to studying, he attended seminary, became a missionary to the Holy Land, and then was ordained a bishop. While in the Russian Mission in Jerusalem he gathered a great many patristic texts, which he translated and later published. While a bishop in Tambov, he strove to make patristic spirituality more widely accessible, writing voluminous works in which he deliberately adjusted spirituality to the simple understanding of the common man. For this he was judged. The purpose and context of his writings were given precedence over scholastic precision. Following this God-sent idea, Bishop Theophan succeeded in transmitting profound patristic realities to readers unlearned in metaphysical concepts. This approach came from the inspiration and example of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, while his meticulous preoccupation with patristic texts was carried over from the Paisian tradition. His pastoral zeal compelled him to go into reclusion in order to reach more people through his written word. Just like St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, he shed copious tears in the loneliness of his cell before a large image of the crucified Lord, thereby acquiring wisdom not of this world and sharing it with millions of people through his books. During the last decades of his life he saw no one except his "abba" (Tikhon, the Abbot of Vysha Monastery) and his cell attendant.

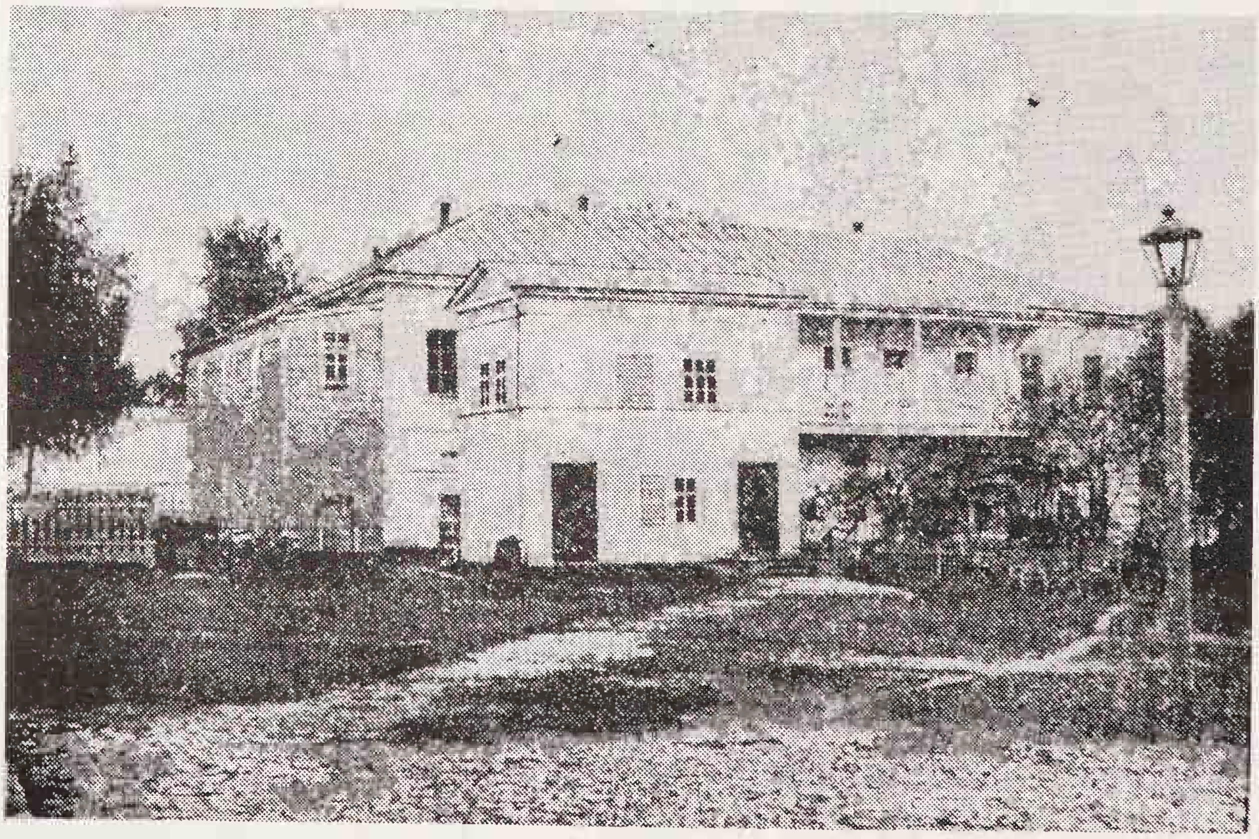
The house where he lived still stands, although desecrated, and the monastery is today a lunatic asylum where abandoned sick folk roam in total poverty and deprivation. The relics of St. Theophan were moved to a nearby village church, and, in place of the renowned monastery, a convent sprang up in a nearby farmhouse. The abbess of this convent, Mother Nonna, has a sisterhood of fervent spiritual daughters of St. Theophan, who hope in the near future to occupy the desecrated environs of the Vysha Monastery and install monastic life in it once again.

St. Theophan's major work, *The Path to Salvation*, contains the quintessence of all his teachings. All his other writings are variations on the themes of this work, and support its main idea. Many of his writings have been taken from the letters which he wrote to his spiritual children.

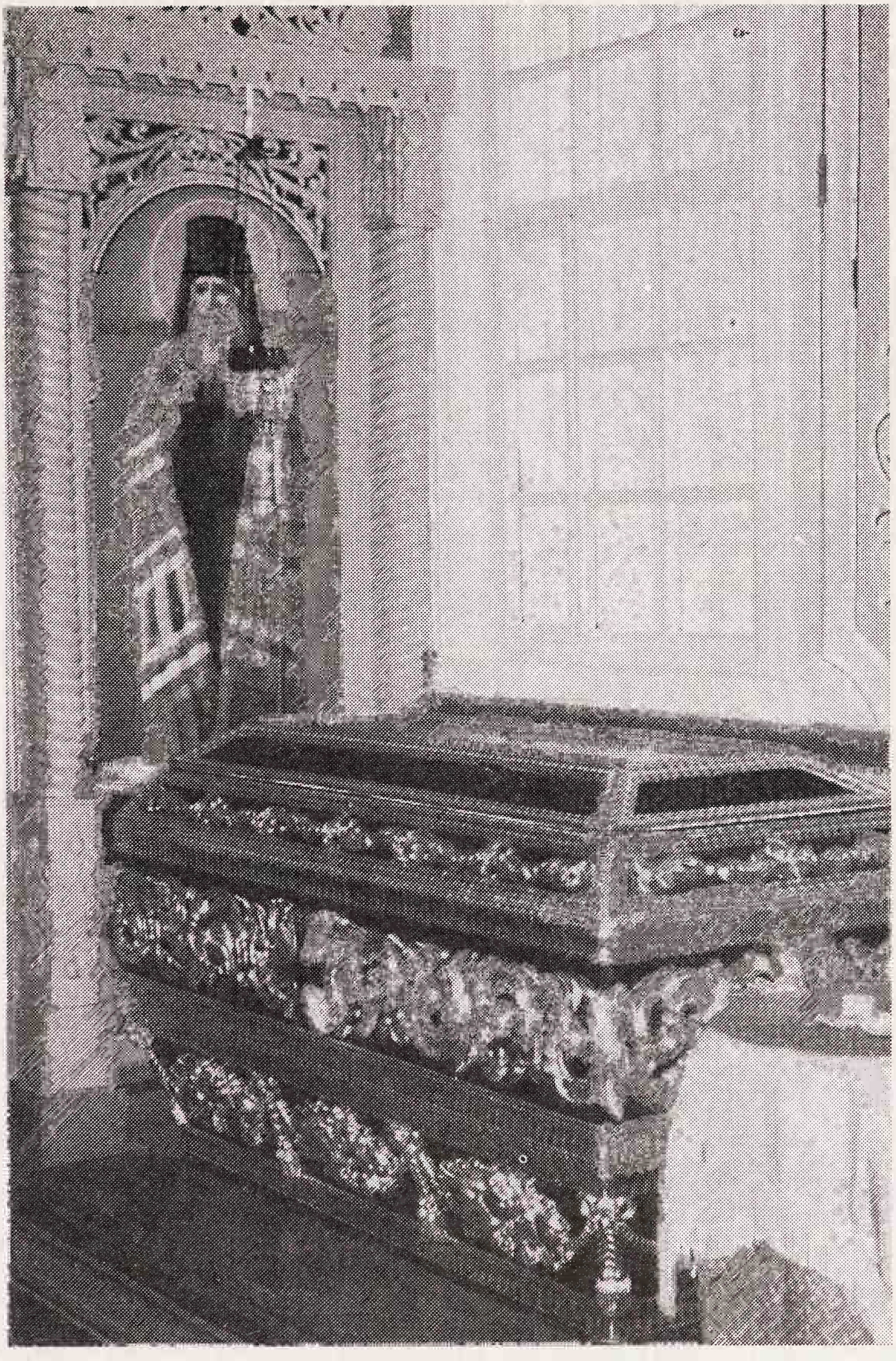
St. Theophan died on his favorite feast day, that of Theophany, bearing as he did, appropriately, the name Theophanes, which means "manifestation of God."

He had numberless direct disciples who actually never personally saw or spoke to him, communicating with him only through correspondence. Some were outstanding theologians, pastors and thinkers. The spiritual descendants of St. Theophan, having caught his zeal, became exponents of the ancient teaching of Christ, transmitting it to the modern age in an accessible way. Three of these great promoters even bore St. Theophan's name: *Theophan, Archbishop of Poltava*, a mystic-theologian for modernity; *Theophan (in Schema, Theodosius)* the Athonite hermit-theologian of Karoulia; and *Theophan of Solikamsk*, Russia's new hieromartyr, who sealed his zeal with martyrdom in the Kama River.

General view of Vysha Monastery in the 19th century, at the time St. Theophan lived in it as a recluse.



The building in Vysha Monastery where St. Theophan lived as a recluse and wrote his books in undistracted silence.



Icon of St. Theophan over his reliquary in the village church near Vysha Monastery.

This book was intended for translation by Fr. Seraphim Rose, who hesitated only due to the difficulty of transmitting the colloquial jargon of the time of St. Theophan into contemporary English. Fr. Seraphim read the book with great enthusiasm, making notes and underlining passages which are especially important for the contemporary American aspirant to spiritual life. **These highlights we are printing in bold type,** for we feel they give an extra dimension to the contemporary understanding.

Years later, God sent a another translator who, herself being a convert to Orthodoxy, poured a labor of love into this book, having one wish for its publication, that it be dedicated to her friends, two carriers of contemporary Russian spirituality in Northern California: the late Bishop Mark of Ladoga and the late Archimandrite Dmitry Egorov of Northern California.

BISHOP MARK

Bishop Mark Shavykin was a monk of Valaam and a cell-attendant to its famous abbot, Chariton (who was brought to monasticism by reading St. Theophan). Abbot Chariton composed two volumes on the Jesus Prayer in the form of questions and answers, consisting mostly of quotes from St. Theophan. Thirty years ago, a modified English translation of these two volumes was published in one volume under the title *The Art of Prayer.* Bishop Mark, while in Valaam in the 1930's, was in close contact with the great elders of Valaam who had been formed by the great Abbot Damascene, a friend of St. Ignatius Brianchaninov. One of Abbot Damascene's disciples, Agapitus, corresponded closely with St. Theophan. Blind Father Agapitus' biography contains their correspondence. Bishop Mark, although not claiming any direct contact with the carriers of St. Theophan's spirituality, nevertheless was able, in a humble way,

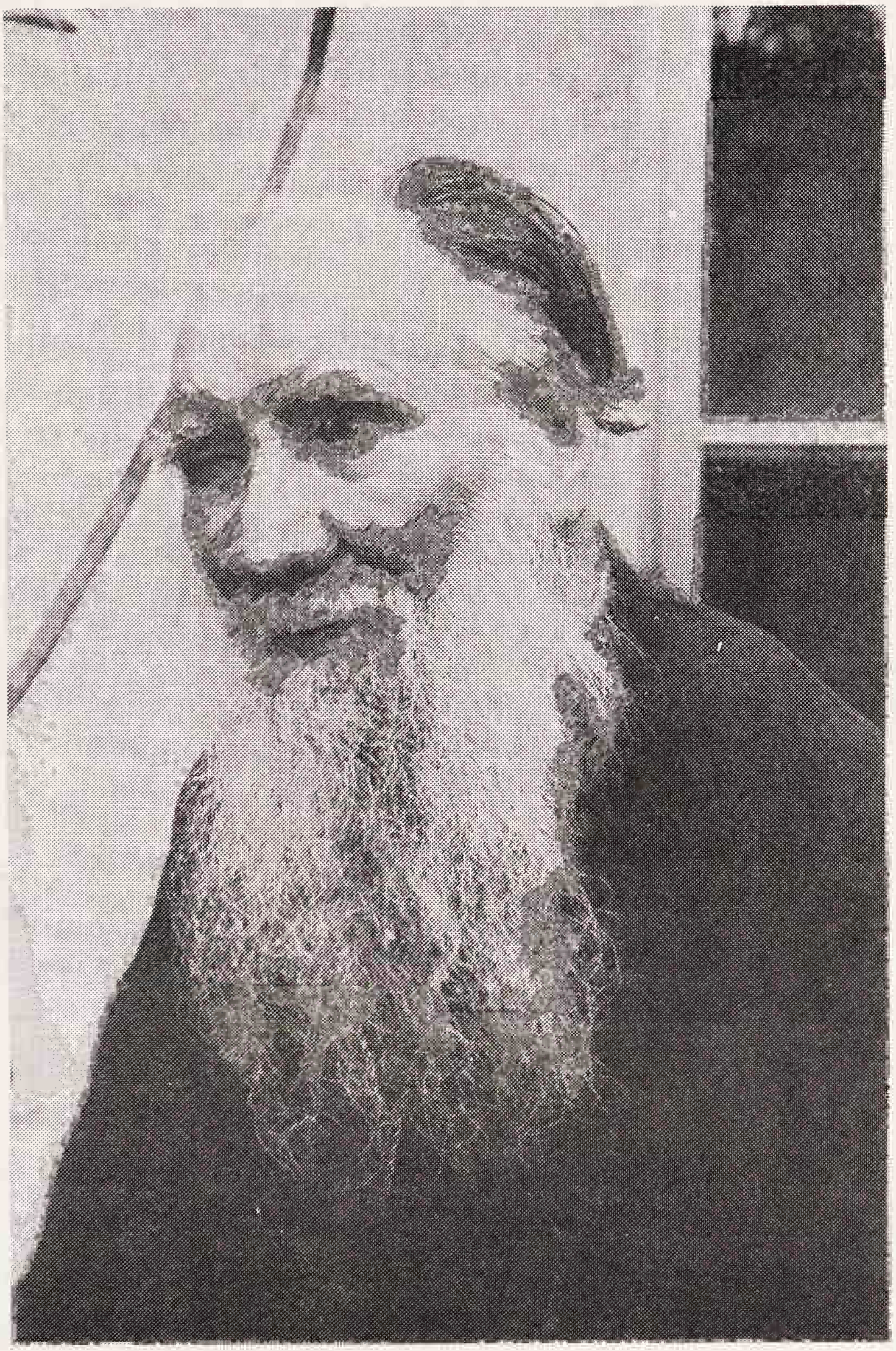
Bishop Mark of Ladoga and San Francisco, once cell-attendant of Abbot Chariton, authority on St. Theophan the Recluse.

to keep awareness alive of the the Valaam tradition in America. He was made a bishop for San Francisco, yet titled Bishop of [Lake] Ladoga, which was "the lake crowned with the island of Valaam." It was the "Bishop of Ladoga" who blessed the birth of the Valaam Society of America, which now publishes this very volume and dedicates it to him.

ARCHIMANDRITE DMITRY

Fr. Dmitry (Egorov) was yet another link with Valaam and an ardent admirer of St. Theophan the Recluse. Arrested by Communists for his adherence to the traditional Orthodox way of life and exiled to the Solovki concentration camp, he was miraculously able to escape that gulag and to stay for awhile at Valaam, then in free Finland. In his flight he was frostbitten, barely escaping death. Arriving at the seedbed of the Valaam Elders, he came to know them well. Subsequently he graduated from the St. Sergius Theological School in Paris, and after the Second World War immigrated to America. While in France he was in close contact with Professor I.M. Kontzevitch, to whom he introduced the work of the Valaamite Fr. Athanasius, *On Valaam Elders.* In America he was the first Abbot of St. Eugene's Hermitage, not too far from Fort Ross on the coast of Northern California, and later he founded the Kazan Icon Skete in Santa Rosa, where he reposed amidst his grieving nuns on June 16/29, 1992.

Fr. Dmitry, to the very utmost, practiced the virtue of simplicity. He was wise, quite removed from the ways of the world, and kind. His strong personality helped him to preserve his monastic identity amidst the distracting squabbles of church factions. He supported monastic endeavors on various levels, despite the contemporary anti-Orthodox ecclesiastical milieu, and was remarkable for his definite adherence to what might be



Archimandrite Dmitry of St. Eugene's Hermitage in California, who founded Kazan Icon Skete for women.

called "Theophanic wisdom," by which he himself lived and guided others on the path of salvation.

Both of these dedicatees, Bishop Mark and Archimandrite Dmitry, were living links who reflected, if not directly then certainly by their enthusaism, the principles of spiritual life so well expressed by Holy Hierarch Theophan: "Spiritual life is such a realm into which the wisdom of this world does not penetrate."

And truly, the otherworldly wisdom which St. Theophan so ardently labored to make accessible desperately needs to be transmitted to modern America. It is the wish of the publishers that the daily life of contemporary Orthodox Christians would become attuned to the world of St. Theophan the Recluse. Otherwise, the cacophony of Orthodox life in contemporary America will give rise to an ecclesiastical dictator, one who is attuned to the ways of this world and foreign to the attunement to Ancient Christianity, of which our beloved St. Theophan the Recluse was a most harmonious conductor.

Holy Hierarch Theophan, pray to God for us!

Abbot Herman
Theophany Skete
December 1/14, 1994

Introduction

Concerning The Law Of God In The Human Being

One of the greatest poets of all times exclaimed about humankind: *What is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him? For Thou has made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet* (Ps. 8:4-6). Yet a profound confusion about human identity hangs about the neck of contemporary mankind like a millstone.

A seemingly rudderless and anchorless society has cast us all adrift on a sea of anxiety. *And man, being in honor, did not understand; he is compared to the mindless cattle, and is become like unto them (Ps. 48:12).* This condition makes us ripe to fall for the old adage, "any port in a storm," and that is just what we do. By the thousands, the millions, we give ourselves to whatever seems to offer some sense of identity or direction, some meaning to life, be that what it may: a life of sensual indulgence, politically correct social activism or the superficial "spirituality" of the self-help league. Even self-immolation upon the altar of the false god of nihilism is to be preferred to the frightening emptiness and naked despair which threatens to overwhelm our fragile hold upon reality.

Why do ye spend money for that which is not bread and labor for that which satisfieth not? (Is. 55:2)These words of the Prophet Isaiah may echo in our ears, yet one who is starving will eat whatever food is offered, even if it be rotten or mixed with poison. This is all the more true of the spiritually starving generation being raised now amidst the enthralling global culture of apostasy; a spiritual famine for the Life-giving Word of God has come upon us.

The spiritual significance for our times of the work you now hold in your hands, therefore, cannot be overstated. At a time when the love of many has grown cold, anything which has the power to bring a bit of warmth into our hearts is to be treasured by the wise spiritual seeker. Here, in these letters of St. Theophan, is not merely a bit of warmth, but warmth in such abundance that even the coldest heart, having read only a few lines, cannot go away unmoved. One's heart responds of its own will to the warmth of the personality of the Holy Recluse, who, having been refined in the fiery furnace of Divine Grace and spiritual *podvig* (labor), became a transmitter of the Love of God and of spiritual illumination to the profit of countless searching souls. People like you and I, who otherwise would continue to drift on a sea of meaninglessness or give our lives to the demons masquerading as angels of light which abound in the "mainstream culture" of our times, if only they distract us from our present, frightening state of despair.

If there is no God, there can be no satisfactory answer to the question, "What is a human being?" Nor, indeed, is there any need to seek one. *Be ye not as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding; whose jaws thou must hold with bit and bridle, lest they come nigh unto thee (Ps. 31:9).* But there is God, and just as there is such a thing as nourishing food for the body, there is an answer to these troubling questions of identity which arise from our souls, an answer which reveals the true meaning of human life. St. Theophan boldly declares:

"Everything which is worthwhile comes out of the structure of man's nature. Many people don't live as they should, because they think that rules about the worthwhile life are outwardly imposed. How could it be otherwise for a man to live, if not in the way for which he was made? It is necessary for us to live as God created us, and when someone does not live this way, I may confidently state that he does not live at all." [Letters 3 and 5]

Does not live at all—isn't that what we have been describing? A human being cut off from contact with God has also lost contact with himself and with the only way of life which has any meaning: one based upon the objective truth of the Law of God which also somehow mysteriously exists within us. Therefore, anyone looking to gain a satisfying understanding of human nature and the meaning of human life must look for it in light of this Law of God. This is exactly what St. Theophan did, and the present work is the fruit of his many years of striving to live according to this Law.

"Human life is complex and multifaceted. It has physical, mental and spiritual aspects. Each aspect has its own powers or characteristics, needs and modes, along with their pursuits and satisfactions. Only when all of our powers are in motion and all of our needs are satisfied does a man live. But when only one small portion of his powers is in motion, and only a small number of his needs are satisfied, then this life is not life. Everything works together as a unit, just as the necessary motion in your sewing machine comes about only when all of its parts are running. Stop the operation of a single part, and the machine stands still...it doesn't live. And man also doesn't live as a human being when everything inside him is not in motion. With a machine, the cessation of its life—motion—is readily apparent; while with man, the inactivity of his life overall is invisible, if only a single aspect of his life is being exercised and a few of his needs are being satisfied, although such a life is just like the machine with its motionlessness. Such is the law of human life!" [Letter 3]

In order to talk about the complex life of a human being, which in reality is a single person, St. Theophan finds it helpful to examine each part or aspect individually and then to see it in relation to the whole: "Once we have established reasonable concepts about man's make-up, we will have the most reliable indication as to how he is to live."

"The body consists of various organs, each of which carries out its function, which is necessary for the body's life.... When the operation of these functions and their interrelationship is in order, the body is healthy, and life is not endangered, but when this order is upset, the body becomes sick and life is endangered...All of this, as you see, has to do with the body; how could this have anything to do with the soul? The soul, by virtue of having the closest contact with the body, has become intertwined with it, and therefore all the needs of the body are to be considered as its needs, too. This is why we say: 'I want to eat, drink, sleep....'" [Letter 5]

This all sounds fairly standard, even "unspiritual" you might say. And it is, for this is only the physical and sensual aspect of life; a necessary part of the whole, but one which must be given firm limits in order to be in harmony with the whole:

"What is undesirable about this life in the moral sense is when a person, who is extremely attracted to things of the belly and the body, sets as his main goal the concern for bodily comfort, or the complete gratification of physical needs only, forgetting about mental needs, and even more about spiritual needs.... The minds and spirits of these people are inevitably famished." [Letter 5]

Just as the functions and needs of the body may be understood more clearly by looking at them individually in terms of nourishment, movement and sensation, so may those of the soul be understood by reference to its various aspects: the intellectual—thinking, imagination, memory; the active or volitional—will, desire; and the sensual—feeling, sensing. The fulfillment of the intellectual part of a person, its reason for existence, is to seek the True. Choice, decision and habit are all in the realm of the will, while zeal for doing God's will arises in the heart and provides the motive force for all aspects of true life. The heart is the central organ of sense for the soul, for by it one can come to sense the spiritual condition of the whole human being. However, the heart is also the organ most oppressed by the passions or illnesses of the soul which come upon us due to the fallenness of the world and our own sinfulness, and therefore is not to be trusted until it has been cleansed of these ills and united to the spirit.

"Just what is the spirit? It is that force which God breathed into man when He created him. The earth bore all the species of earthly creatures by God's command. From the earth came also every kind of living creature's soul. The human soul, although it resembles the animal soul in its lowest part, is incomparably superior to it in its highest part. That it is this way in man is because of its bonding with the spirit. The spirit, breathed by God, combined with it and raised it far above every non-human soul. That is why we note within ourselves, in addition to what we see in the animals, that which is peculiar to the spiritualized soul of man, and even higher, that which is peculiar only to the spirit." [Letter 9]

The soul therefore is the connecting link between the body and the spirit, being intertwined with the body and participating in fulfilling its needs, and being inspired toward the heavenly realm by the penetration of the spirit. However, in our fallen condition this does not happen automatically. The parts are all out of harmony and thus true human life is not experienced by most people. "Is your soul inspired?" St. Theophan asks, or is it a slave to the fashions of superficial, worldly life? The signs of an inspired soul are: the presence of the fear of God, a sensitive conscience and the longing for God. Are these qualities in us?

"A person receives a particular character, according to the kind of life he lives, and this character is reflected in his views and attitudes, his habits, and his feelings. That is, his life is either spiritual, with spiritual views, habits and feelings; or it is intellectual, with intellectual concepts, habits and feelings; or it is carnal, with carnal thoughts, deeds and feelings. This doesn't mean that when a man is spiritual that the intellectual and the physical have no place in him, but only that the spiritual predominates, subordinating to itself and penetrating the intellectual and the physical. Equally, it doesn't mean that when a man is intellectual, that his spiritual and physical aspects no longer exist; rather, when the intellectual predominates, it rules everything and gives its tone to everything and envelops the spiritual with the cover of intellect. Neither does it mean that when a man is carnal, that his spiritual and intellectual aspects no longer exist; rather, that everything about him becomes carnal, both spirit and intellect become carnal, subordinated to the flesh and trampled by it and held in its bondage." [Letter 12]

Having arrived at an elementary understanding of what a human being is by looking at the various part of our make-up and how they relate to the whole, we can now begin to understand that, indeed, there is a way of living which best suits a human being:

"From this you see that according to natural purpose, man must live in the spirit, subordinate to the spirit and penetrate with the spirit all that is intellectual, and even more so all that is physical—and beyond these the outward things, too, that is family and social life. This is the norm!" [Letter 12]

May God grant that we rise to achieve such a norm! Judged by it the vast majority of the human race is not experiencing human life at all. And what about us? Perhaps it still seems a bit confusing; good enough in theory, but what is one supposed to do about it? A few excerpts and a sketchy outline of the "structure" of a human being according to St. Theophan can only hint at the wealth of practical direction about living the spiritual life to be found in the text below. St. Theophan advises, "I don't think that anything from this is difficult for you; I would ask, however, that you not just skim over what I have written, but that you examine it carefully, and apply it to yourself." To do that we must now turn to the text itself and read with attention and prayerfulness all that has been written there for our spiritual edification.

In answer to our prayer, the prayer of a lost but seeking generation, St. Theophan will enter bringing his vision of the Law of God in the human being. Happy is the one who finds such a spiritual father and guide as St. Theophan; happy is the one who follows him to the goal of authentic human life. Come then, oh gentle reader, *taste and see that the Lord is good,* for herein is offered to you a guidebook for the spiritual life; not merely a description, but a prescription for living the life in Christ.

Fr. Philip Tolbert
St. Theophan the Recluse Society of America
Feast of the Holy Prophet Daniel
and the Three Holy Youths
Dec. 17/30, 1994

Abbess Nonna and the sisters of the Vysha Monastery today, photographed by one of our Brotherhood.

I

THE SUBJECT OF OUR CORRESPONDENCE
THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Introductory reminder about the promise given to correspond about the spiritual life. The benefit to be expected from this.

Before your departure to Moscow, we agreed to carry on a correspondence concerning the things most needful to you. Of course, I expected you would let me know how you were doing, and how you were getting settled. I have waited and waited, and am still waiting; how much time has passed, and I have yet to hear anything. Has something happened? Are you in good health? May the Mother of God keep you. Perhaps your intentions have changed? Anything is possible. That is why I am writing now, so that if that is the case, and you are concerned this correspondence would be some sort of burden on me, that you put that thought out of your head. Writing to you about these things would not be a burden for me at all; on the contrary, it would bring me no small satisfaction, and introduce some variety to my usual daily routine. Moreover, if it does not come about, then I would feel as if I had suffered a great loss. I will not try to explain how this could be, but I emphasize that it would be so.

It would not be proper to give you advice here; rather, I will make a request: write. But you should not expect any great wisdom from me. Just a review of all that is truly worthwhile should furnish you with no small benefit, after it has revived your memory in this realm and concentrated your attention on it, perhaps, with fervor and with special energy. And just what is the good that is to be had from all this?! For, if we have problems in our lives, it is almost always not so much from ill will and a bad heart so much as it is from a lack of ardor and zeal for what is worthwhile.

Write me.

2

VANITY OF WORLDLY LIFE

A remark about the cause of his silence. The frankness and simplicity required in correspondence. The vanity of worldly life.

I got all caught up in speculating as to what could have happened, and it turns out that your grandmother was a little sick. Well, "grandmother;" there is a victorious word. For grandchildren, there is no warmer place than at grandmother's, and for grandmother, there is no one dearer than good grandchildren. For this we must thank God.[1] You should comfort your grandmother more often and listen attentively to what she says. **Old women have a wisdom** acquired through life's experiences and labors. Often they unknowingly express in simple words such wise lessons as you could never find in books, even if you searched entire libraries.

Although you have given a very satisfactory explanation as to why you have not written for so long, it would be all the same proper to impose upon you an *epitheme,*[1] small though it may be, with a view to correction. I think, however, that perhaps you would be better disposed to correction if I thanked you for writing, and for what you wrote. And so I thank you.

---

[1] Father Seraphim's note: "Good, warm atmosphere for spiritual life—lacking today."

You promise to be open. Good! Openness is the most important thing in correspondence; otherwise there would be no reason to even begin it. Always write straight from the shoulder. Write what is on your mind, and take care to state fully the questions which are stirring in your head and begging for an answer. Only then may **solutions be arrived at, just as parched ground receives water. This is the simplest method of both acquiring and fixing in the mind concepts**[2] which elucidate subjects and matters which we consider it necessary to have a clear vision of in our mind's eye. What would be the use if I were to write you about one thing, and your mind was occupied with something else? It would be **empty words**, as if two people were having a conversation with their backs turned to each other, and each person was discussing what was in front of his own eyes. It seems that we have already established that we will not concern ourselves with abstraction, or draw up plans and theories; instead, our conversation will be on life's everyday occurrences. And so we will proceed step by step.

You write that you are "dazzled." You say, "For about two days I have been making the usual social rounds here. First I went to the theater, then I went merry-making, then I went to a party. What kind of crowd is this, with the kinds of things they talk about, the kinds of abstruse opinions they have about everything, the kinds of manners they have? All this is barbarous to me, and I will never be able to collect my thoughts in this mob." This is the first time you have been exposed to this; you will get used to it. The impression you have received, after your quiet and simple family life in the village, is entirely in the order of things. That is where your judgment was formed as to what is true and false in life, although I am not exactly sure just what it is that has lodged itself in your mind from the past. It is also possible that, while on the surface there seems to be disapproval of such things, deeper down there is sympathy for them and a desire to repeat them. **The life of which you have seen a small part has stupefying characteristics. Those who participate in it also see that everything is not what it seems, but all the same they are drawn to it, like an opium addict**, who knows what is in store for him: He is like a madman, who, in spite of everything, takes his drug, or perhaps for that very reason he takes it.

---

[1] *Epitheme* is defined as "A spiritual punishment, or better, an exercise with the purpose of overcoming sinful conditions...." (*Polnyy Tserkovnoslavyanskiy Slovar,* Vol. I, Moscow, 1899).

[2] Fr. Seraphim's note: "Condition for receiving spiritual counsel."

How are you doing? Are you still attracted to that place? Would you find it desirable to live your life in this way? I ask you to sketch me a little picture...and be truthful.

3

EMPTINESS

The emptiness and one-sidedness of worldly life.

How happy you made me by your reply! "I am not at all attracted to such a life; on the contrary, I am repelled by it. Less than a day afterward, I felt shattered, my soul was languishing and melancholy, and I could not stand myself. It was only with great difficulty that I felt relief." Why didn't you write me about this last time? It even seemed to me that, by your silence, you were concealing a sweetheart or some other thorn in your side.

God grant that such a feeling—rejecting worldly life and amusements—always be within you. But it is also possible to fall in love with such things. It is obvious that you should not come into contact with such a life. The second time around, it will not seem so destructive and disturbing; the third time, even less so, and then it will not even seem bad at all. As they say about vodka, with the first glass you are just breaking the bonds, with the second glass you soar like an eagle, and after that you just pour. What happens when someone visits a tobacco factory? Their eyes smart, their noses run, they cannot breathe. But those who work there feel absolutely nothing, and even those who are new to it, after standing around for a little while, no longer screw up their eyes, sneeze or cough so much, and then even these discomforts cease completely. Watch that nothing like this happens to disturb your peace!

It seems you have forestalled my question. You say, "I do not think I will ever reconcile myself to such a life. I look closely and I find that it is not life. I cannot explain it, but I am firmly convinced in my mind that it is not life. There is a lot of motion, but no life. My sewing machine makes a great deal of hustle and bustle, but what kind of life is there in it?" Your bright little mind has given birth to an excellent idea. Now I am able to consider your situation to be more hopeful. The feeling is tentative, however; it could change. But when some fundamental idea comes to the aid of this feeling, then it is strengthened, and in its turn, it strengthens the idea. Together, they resemble a fortress. In order for this fortress to be fortified, you must understand just why there is no life in such a life. If we continue our discussions, then in time this will be explained in detail, but for now I will just say this: The reason that there is no life in such a life is that it does not occupy and nourish all the aspects of human life, but only a small portion of it. And this small portion stands in last place, not even touching the center of human life.

Human life is complex and multi-faceted. It has physical, mental and spiritual aspects. Each aspect has its powers, needs and modes, and the exercise and satisfaction of them. **Only when all of our powers are in motion and all of our needs are satisfied does a man live. But when only one small portion of his powers is in motion, and only a small number of his needs are satisfied, this life is not life.** Everything works together as a unit, just as the necessary motion in your sewing machine comes about only when all of its parts are running. Stop the operation of a single part, and the machine stands still...it does not live. **Man also does not live as a human being when everything inside him is not in motion.** With a machine, the cessation of its life—motion—is readily apparent; **while with man, the inactivity of his life overall is invisible, if only a single aspect of his life is being exercised and a few of his needs are being satisfied**, although such a life is just like the machine with its motionlessness. **Such is the law of human life!**

Let us apply this law to the situation we have been discussing. **Which powers are in use there**, and what kind of needs are being satisfied? In use are the hands, legs, tongue, eyes, ears, sense of smell, sense of touch, memory, imagination, fantasy and wit, the sum total of which **represents the lowest human aspect, which man holds in common with the animals.** Animal life has only a single need to be satisfied, or better, to be played out; such may be seen in operation when young lambs are driven with ewes to a green field. **In addition to these powers, there are another two or three layers in man, and they also have a main center.**

Judge for yourself now: Can such a life really be life? Your feeling told you that there is no life in such a life. I will show you the main reason why there is not. Maybe the operation of this reason is not so clear for you at present, but the overall concept should be. The details will become clear with time. For I propose that everything that is worthwhile comes out of the structure of man's nature. **It is necessary for us to live as God created us, and when someone does not live this way, I may confidently state that he does not live at all.** I ask that you be satisfied with this for the time being.

4

SPIRITUAL FREEDOM OR SPIRITUAL SLAVERY

Worldly life deprives one of freedom and holds in cruel slavery
those devoted to the world. Hypocrisy and egoism
as persistent qualities of worldly life.

Last time I did not talk about anything you had touched upon in your letter, and so I am sending you an addition. You say, "Another thing I see is how everyone rushes around in a huff, in pursuit of something which no one ever manages to catch. When I happen to pass through some crowded street or place, what a fuss and bustle I see! But then I look—it is the same thing in their homes, and it is probably in their souls, too. I am at a loss—is it really possible to live this way? Another thing I see is how they bind, constrain and tyrannize each other; no one has his own will or any freedom. You do not dare dress as you would like to dress, you do not dare act as you would like to act, you cannot say what you would like to say—you cannot do anything as you would like to do it. Everything they do is subject to some law that was written by no one knows who. It binds everyone, but no one knows how to break its hold. It is in this way that they tyrannize each other. You do not dare listen to anyone—that is unfortunate. I, for example, sing. When you want to sing, it is really paradise; it is pleasant for me and for the listeners. But there are times when you sing whether you want to or not. It is considered very polite to do this; to refuse would be considered against the 'law.' And so you sing. The burden is unbearable for me—your chest almost collapses, but you thrust it out to show that you are singing with all your heart. I have noticed this in others, too. There is your freedom for you! Looking from the outside, everyone seems a freeman. A freeman, who gets all tangled up in his arms and legs! It was in regard to this that I began to examine closely whether people do things from the heart. And what of it? Maybe I am mistaken, **but I have not seen anything that could be from the soul**. There are empty caresses, a readiness to do things for each other, and also mutual admiration. Everything is superficial. Beneath the outward appearance that is elegant and smooth is concealed an entirely different spirit, which, if it were to be brought to light, would be found to be neither elegant nor even tolerable. So, it turns out that when we gather together, we are a collection of hypocritical actors and actresses. What a comedy! Furthermore, **what I find most astonishing is the coldness coming from everyone**. How could this be?! Indeed, everyone seems to be everyone else's friend, ready to give them the shirt off their back, but there is an underlying coldness."

You are quite right. There is nothing more to add to your description. All this has long since been observed and mentioned to forewarn us. Long ago, Macarius the Great described this bustle of life with its futile pursuit, a little of which you have experienced. "The children of this age have become like wheat poured into the sieve of this earth, and then scattered among the inconstant dreams of this world, in the presence of the unending turmoil of earthly cares, desires and maze of material concepts. Satan shakes the souls, and with the sieve, that is, the earthly cares, scatters the entire sinful human race. From the time of the Fall, when Adam transgressed the law and came under the prince of darkness who gained power over him, with the unending seductive and turbulent thoughts of all the sons of this age, he has led them to conflict in this sieve of the earth. The more the wheat in the sieve is shaken about, turned over and cast up, the more the prince of darkness takes over all people with their earthly cares: he shakes them, agitates them and alarms them, forcing them to flee to vain thoughts, unclean desires, earthly and worldly bonds, and constantly enticing the sinful race of Adam.

"The Lord foretold to the Apostles the future coming of temptation over them: *Satan hath desired to have you, that he might sift you like wheat: but I have prayed to My Father that thy faith fail not* (Luke 22:31,32). The pronouncement and decision spoken by the Creator to Cain is clear: *Thou shalt be groaning and trembling on the earth* (Genesis 4:12).[1] This sentence serves as a secret image and likeness to all sinners, because Adam's race, having transgressed the commandment and fallen into sin, secretly took upon itself these likenesses. People are led into uncertainty by inconstant thoughts of fear, terror, every kind of confusion, desire, and all kinds of pleasures. The prince of this world disturbs every soul which is not born from God, and he disturbs human ideas, which are like wheat constantly being shaken in the sieve, leading everyone into uncertainty, and ensnaring them with worldly seductions, pleasures of the flesh, terrors and confusions." (Homily 5:1,2)

There is the summary of your observation! You noticed the way things are, and St. Macarius indicated both the reason for this and the origin. It is impossible to begin to speak of this view of the matter in this way if one does not begin to acquire this manner of speaking about things. I therefore ask you to adopt this view and always keep it in mind. It expresses the essence of the matter, and, once you have accepted it with conviction, **it will serve for you as a restraint from the charm of worldly life.** In order to be able to think about this more and to get more familiar with this manner of thought, try to read the entire Fifth Homily of St. Macarius. I lent this book to your mother, and she wanted to acquire it.

---

[1] This translation is from the *Septuagint,* to which the Church Slavonic adheres. The King James version reads *A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.*

For my part, I would just add that **this futile pursuit and general discontent with everything goes back to the very thing of which I wrote last time. That is, the fact that not every aspect or need of human nature can be nourished by this way of life. An unsatisfied aspect such as hunger demands nourishment in the gratification of its need and drives man to seek such.** So man runs to seek gratification, but as he moves around in that very circle, unsatisfied with respect to hunger, no gratification occurs, and hunger does not cease. But neither does the need for nourishment cease, nor does the pursuit of it. **And it will never cease for those who live in the spirit of this world.** Because the enemy blinds them, they do not notice their error: they have taken the wrong path and are headed in the wrong direction; in this darkness he torments and stifles these poor souls. So the enemy has blinded them, and there is no one to tell them of their error. Thus they roar like ferocious beasts. Isn't this the roar of the lion who goes about everywhere, *seeking whom he may devour*?

As for the other aspects of worldly life which you noted, I would just say that it cannot be any other way. For *such a life is the life of the fallen man, whose primary characteristic is pride or egoism*, which presents itself as the primary goal, while everyone and everything else are the means. Thus, everyone's goal is to impose his desires on someone else, or to bind him by them; you have quite accurately called this "tyranny." No matter how well someone conceals his desires, behind them stands egoism, which desires to twist you to its needs, or to use you as its means. So **the goal is one of deception**; essentially, it uses the strained contrivance of concealing one's faults without correcting them. Otherwise, one's influence on others and manipulation of them would be stopped. **That is the reason that everyone exudes such coldness: everyone shuts himself up in his own shell and is unable to produce any warmth.**

It is true that you will probably meet a few people with a kind heart; they flatter and touch the heart deeply and directly. Such a disposition is a vestige of the feeling of kinship with others with which man is endowed, but this is at the service of egoism, which uses it as the most expedient means for achieving its ends. I know one such person. **It is better to be an outright egoist than such a flatterer.** Although it is possible to make out what these flatterers are leading up to, it is a rare person who is able to do so.

While it is true that you almost continually come across good deeds, these are done only to obligate you ten times over for the one good deed. You will say, "How can this be? Everyone is always striving for honesty, and if you show dishonesty in something, you ruin yourself." It is true that this is so, but this honesty is the mask of egoism; the main thing is not to besmirch oneself and lose face, and for this reason the most disgusting deeds are allowed, as many as one can get away with and conceal from others. You will even hear, or have already heard, someone condemned as being an egoist. Do not think that those who speak like this are themselves above egoism. No, they condemn those who do not allow themselves to be exploited or used as a means to the egoistical ends of those who so judge them. Consequently, the latter are to be exposed as the real egoists. I have heard that such individuals even reproach monks for egoism; they say that monks live selfishly by themselves. Poor monks! They do not eat, drink or sleep; they are on their feet day and night, in obedience, not having their own will or way—and somehow they have become egoists! By this alone, you may judge of what value in general these accusations of egoism are, such as you hear or will hear among worldly people. They mean they have met their match!

In looking over what I have written, I see that I have judged worldly life very bluntly, but I will not take back a single word. Maybe I would not have written what I have, except that I wanted you yourself to take notice of the rather dark stain on the world. I took a fancy to singing in this particular key, and I do not think it will warp you in any way, considering what you yourself have said. But I expect you to ask, "Just how is one to be?" This is what we will be trying to answer for the rest of our correspondence. For now I will just say that, **for you to shun everyone is, of course, impossible; but refuse as much as possible to enter into this circle of worldly life. When it does pull you against your will, act as if you were not there; look, but do not see; listen, but do not hear.** Let what you see pass by your eyes, and what you hear pass by your ears. **Outwardly behave like everyone else, be straightforward and sincere; but guard your heart from sympathies and attractions.** The main thing is to guard the heart, then you will be there in body only, but not in soul, faithfully carrying out the commandment of the Apostle: *Be as...they that use this world, (but) don't abuse it* (I Cor. 7:31). "World" here refers to worldly life. You will be using the world, that is, you will have a need to come into contact with worldly life; but when you keep your heart at a distance, then you will not be abusing that life; **that is, you will not be participating in it out of sympathy and desire, but out of being obliged by your present circumstances.**

I have worn you out by my long letter, but you compelled me to do it. I ask that you carefully peruse what I have written, especially the last lines.

5

THE LIFE OF THE BODY

Three realms of human life. The first realm: the life of the body, its organs and needs; normal and excessive care for the body.

How many questions you have come up with regarding my two previous letters! This shows you to be a lively, industrious and receptive pupil, and promises success. I shall write all the more willingly. But I will not answer everything for you right now; I shall leave the answers for the other times. I will occupy myself with what you are most occupied. You write, "Your words about the aspects, powers and needs of human nature are bringing me into myself. I am turning inward. I see some of it, but the greater part of it is at times obscure, at other times completely invisible to me. I desire very much to know what the spiritual, mental and physical aspects are in man, what the needs are for each, and how they are satisfied. I would very much like to keep myself on the level of human worth, of true human worth, such as is appointed to us by the Creator."

Excellent! You are touching the very foundations of our life, the explanation of which will give us the foundations for future discussions. For how could it be otherwise for man to live, if not in the way for which he was made. Once we have established reasonable concepts about man's make-up, we will have the most reliable indication as to how he is to live. I think many people do not live as they should, because they think that rules about the worthwhile life are outwardly imposed, and, not

springing from man's very nature, are therefore not needed by them. If they were certain that there were such rules, they would not transgress them and fall away from them. And so listen, if you will.

The *body* consists of various organs, each of which carries out its function, which is necessary for the body's life. There are three major systems: 1) the ***digestive***, which includes the lungs, heart, arteries and veins, lymphatic vessels and multiplicity of other vessels, ducts and glands, which serve as the various conduits for the blood and other bodily fluids; the function of all of these is the ***nourishment*** of the body; 2) the ***musculoskeletal system***, the function of which is inner and outer ***movement***, and 3) the ***nervous system***, the center of which is the head, and the spinal cord and system of ganglia, which are located underneath the abdominal and chest cavity, while the radicles of the nerves pass through the entire body; the function of these is *sensory*. **When the operation of these functions and their interrelationship is in order, the body is healthy** and life is not endangered; but when this order is upset, the body becomes sick and life is endangered. **Each function has its own particular need**, which, making itself felt by the living creature, demands satisfaction. The ***needs*** **of the** ***digestive***, or alimentary and corporeal part are: ***food, drink, air*** **and** ***sleep;*** **the** ***need*** **of the** ***musculoskeletal part*** is to ***tense*** the ***muscles***, which need everyone feels after sitting for too long a period of time; following directly upon this is the ***need*** for ***movement***, which compels one to walk, stroll or perform some sort of work; the ***need*** of the ***nervous part*** is the ***pleasant stimulation of the nerves*** of the entire body, such as the regulation of warmth and cold and the like, and especially the pleasant stimulation of the five senses, by which the nervous system comes in contact with the outside world.

All this, as you see, has to do with the body; the soul would seem to have nothing to do with it. But because the soul, by virtue of having the closest contact with the body, has become intertwined with it, therefore all the needs of the body are to be considered as its needs, too. That is why we say: “I want to eat, drink, sleep. I want to walk, stroll around, work. I want to see various colors, hear various things, smell various smells,” and the like. Having assimilated to itself all the body’s needs, the soul considers the satisfaction of these needs to be its business, and thus concerns itself with food, drink, sleep, clothing, shelter and other like things, desiring in every way to make the body comfortable so that it will not bother it with its annoying needs. **This relationship of the soul to the body, which is a one-sided relationship**, comes from a certain inner compulsion, which is **found in it as a sort of instinct, *creature-love*, *love* for the *body*, the *desire* to *maintain the comfort*** of the body and obtain all that is needed for it.

The sum total of all this comprises the physical aspect of human life. However, not everything here is equally physical, or carnal and sensual. **Only the digestive system is strongly carnal**; but even it is ennobled by the adaptation of its satisfaction to strictly mental needs and purposes. **The organs of movement and feeling serve mental needs more than bodily ones. One organ**, which stands apart from the system of other organs, **the organ of speech, is an organ exclusively of the soul,** which alone it is intended to serve.

What is undesirable about the physical, carnal and sensual life in the moral sense is when a person who is extremely attracted to things of the belly and the body sets as his main goal the concern for bodily comfort, or the complete gratification of physical needs only, forgetting about mental needs, and even more about spiritual needs. In this case, each physical need, simple in nature, branches out into a diversity of needs inculcated by habit, and an inclination for various means of gratification. Take food, drink or clothing, for example. What could be more basic than these things! Meanwhile, how many needs are constant: Give it to me if it kills me!

With this in mind, we see that we are not always free, because we are always chasing after needs to satisfy them; at the same time, dozens of other people are doing exactly the same thing. **The minds and spirits of these people are inevitably famished, if not completely deadened, stopped up, and immersed in sensuality.**

Think over all this, if you will. As for the mind, that will be for the next letter.

6

THE LIFE OF THE SOUL
THE INTELLECTUAL ASPECT

The second realm of human life: the life of the soul and her three primary categories. The first category: the intellectual aspect with its operations. Knowledge and science. The normal course of thought and the empty wandering of the thoughts.

You have previously gone inward; let us enter within once again. See what a multiplicity and variety of actions and motions there are! First one, then another enters and exits; takes root, then is rejected; does something, and does it again. This is **because the soul is in continual motion, and is unable to stand still on one thing.** If we were to begin to look at the soul as a whole, we would not be able to make out anything, and so we must divide it into parts, and then examine each part individually. We have already long since looked over and **divided all motions of the soul into three categories: thoughts, desires and senses,** each of which has received its name from a particular aspect of the soul—the intellectual (thinking), the desiring, and the sensual. Using this division, we will begin looking at each aspect.

The Intellectual Aspect. **If there is confusion within us, it has its greatest scope within our thoughts**; our very desires and feelings are already stirred up under the action of the thoughts. In the category of thought, however, not everything is chaotic motion; in the midst of these thoughts are a number of substantial operations. It is precisely these that comprise actual mental life, from the standpoint of the thoughts. These operations are as follows:

1) As soon as you have observed something in me by means of your senses, or you have heard others relate how they have observed something with their senses, at that instant the ***imagination*** is imagining, and the ***memory*** is remembering, everything; **nothing can enter the soul without the imagination and memory. Thus, subsequent mental activity rests upon the imagination and the memory.** If something is not stored in the memory, you will not be able to imagine it, let alone think about it. It does happen that thoughts are sometimes born directly from the soul, but then they immediately assume a form. **Thus, the entire intellectual aspect of the soul is *imaginative.***

2) The imagination and memory obtain and store only material for thoughts. The motion of thought itself comes out of the soul and operates according to the laws of the soul. Do you remember how your youngest brother, once he had seen something new, would immediately ask you or someone else, "What is that? Who made that? What is it made of?" He would not calm down until all of these questions were answered to his satisfaction. The intellection of the soul begins specifically as the result of these questions, and it bears thoughts in answer to them or it receives ready-made answers from others. The imagination and the memory do not think. They are the unskilled labor force, the backbone. The faculty of the soul, from which

arise such questions and thoughts that are sought and born in answer to them, is called the ***intellect*****, whose business it is to reason, think things over, and reach the necessary** conclusions. Observe yourself, and you will find that you cannot do anything without thinking it over. Every trifle must be deliberated. No matter how quickly this is accomplished, the understanding enters into everything and goes by the aforementioned questions.

3) While you are thinking something over, there is as yet no clearly defined thought. A definite thought comes into being when you find an answer to one of the questions. Your intellect sorts through everything, seeking to find what kind of thing something is, where it comes from, what it is for, and the like. When you find an answer yourself, or you have heard it from someone else and agree with it, you usually say, "Now I understand, I do not need any further explanation, the matter is resolved." This answer quiets your intellection with respect to the subject you have been studying. Then your intellect turns to other subjects, while the thought which has just been formed is given over to the mental archive—the memory, from which, by the demand of necessity, it is pulled as an aid in the answering of other questions, and as a means for composing other thoughts. The sum total of concepts that have been formed in this way constitutes the image of your thoughts, which image you also detect whenever you are speaking. This is the realm of the ***knowledge*** **you obtain through mental labor.** The more problems you solve, the more definite thoughts or ideas about things you will have; the more such ideas you have, the broader the sphere of your knowledge. In this way, as you see, **your intellect stands above the memory** and imagination; this intellect, **along with** ***intellectual labor*****, obtains for you** definite *concepts* or *cognitions* about things.

We will not be able to obtain a definite answer to every question. The greater number of them will remain unanswered. **People think and think, but they cannot come up with anything definite.** That is why they say, "Maybe it is this way, maybe it is that way." **This yields *opinions* and *suppositions*; in total, don't we have more of these than definite cognitions?**

When someone, in discussing a certain class of objects, obtains from himself and from others through borrowing so many definite thoughts and concepts, and manages to add such good opinions and suppositions to the unresolved items, that it is possible to consider this realm of objects sufficiently well-known and understood; then all that has been obtained is put in order, is set out in the proper relation and sequence, and gives us a ***science*** of those objects. **Science is the crown of the intellectual labor of the intellect.**

I will explain all of this to you later, in order to make clear to you **of what the natural and proper operation of our intellectual faculty must consist.** It would be proper to discuss diligently what is as yet unknown, in order to come to know it. Very few people are capable of being scientists, and not everyone is able to study the sciences, but **everyone is capable of and must discuss the things surrounding us, in order to obtain definite concepts about them.** That is the proper undertaking of the intellectual faculty in everyone. How much it will obtain depends upon its strength; but **it should always be occupied with the substantial business of thinking things over, and the discussion of reality.**

Meanwhile, **what do we see in our mental realm? The continual motion of images and notions without any definite purpose or order.** Thoughts rise up one after the other, they form into a line, then they intersect each other, race a few steps forward, then go backward, then run sideways, never stopping for anything. This is not reasoning; it is the wandering and scattering of thoughts; therefore, this state is the complete opposite of what our intellectual faculty is supposed to be. That is its illness, which is so inculcated in it and so endemic to everyone, that **it would be impossible to find a single human being who is capable of continuously conducting the substantial labor of thinking,** who is not subject to this scattering and wandering of various thoughts, which divert him from his occupation and pull him in different directions. Often we get lost in thought. What kind of state is this? Here is a description: A thought goes into the memory archive, and with the help of the imagination, it sorts through all the rubbish which has accumulated there, switching from event to event, and, according to the laws of combining notions, it weaves something which has not been experienced together with something which has, and often weaves the impossible together with what has been experienced, doing this until the person "comes to," and returns to the surrounding reality. People say, "He is deep in thought." In reality, he is deep in emptiness, and his intellect is not involved in a substantial discussion of any matter. It is the very same thing as the dreams you have when you are sleeping—idle and empty thought. Observe yourself, and you will see that **the greater part of our time is spent on such empty and straying thought.** Some days (and are there not more of these), not a single substantial thought enters the mind. I ask you to pay attention to this and spend some time solving this problem: **Is it proper for a rational creature to act in this way?** In the meantime, I shall turn to another sort of mental reality.

7

THE LIFE OF THE SOUL THE DESIROUS ASPECT

The desirous aspect of the life of the soul. Its function. The healthy and disorderly states of the appetitive capacity.

The Aspect of Desire. The faculty that operates here is the **will,** which wills, desires to acquire, use or do what is beneficial to itself or which is necessary or pleasant; in addition, it does not will or desire anything which is contrary or unpleasant. Disturbances of the will demand a corresponding act, because the will is in fact the active power, the essential need of which is to live and function. It maintains under its supervision all powers of the soul and body, and all functions which are at its disposal, all of which are put to use when needed. **At its foundation lies** *zeal,* or ardor—the thirst for something. **Its stimuli are the** ***pleasant, beneficial*** **and** ***necessary*; when these are present, zeal sleeps, and the active powers lose their tension and fall away. They support desire, while desire kindles zeal.**

The mental aspect may be analyzed as follows. In the soul and body are needs, including such ordinary ones as family and social needs. These needs in and of themselves do not constitute any distinct desire, but merely form the pretext for seeking gratification for themselves. When a need is satisfied in a particular way on a given occasion, then ever afterward, whenever this need is aroused, along with it is born the desire for that which has satisfied it previously. Desire always has a distinct object: a satisfied need. Another need has been satisfied in diverse ways; that is why when it is aroused, a diversity of desires is born—first this, then that, then a third thing capable of satisfying that need. When we analyze man's life, the needs behind the desires are not even apparent. Only the desires burrow into the soul and demand satisfaction, as if for their own sakes.

What does the soul do about these desires? It is presented with a **choice** as to which object it will give preference from among all those which has been set before it. Along with this choice comes a **decision**—to make, to attain or to use the chosen object. In accordance with the decision, **means are selected**, a method is defined, and a procedure for carrying it out. After all of this comes the act in its own good time and place. Everything, even the most trifling act, goes according to this procedure. You may check this yourself with your own routine. Sometimes all these operations are carried out instantaneously by habit, and the act follows immediately upon the desire. Choice, decision and means are then undertaken from previous acts, and do not demand a specially formulated basis.

In a person who has lived for some time, almost everything is done by habit. Rarely does any new enterprise or undertaking occur which departs from the usual order of business and knowledge. So it is that the life which has been established demands acts corresponding to itself. As these acts repeat themselves often, it is natural that they become habits, ways and rules of life and character. **The way of life of a particular person is established from the sum total of all habits, rules and procedures of this type, in such a manner that the way of his thinking and his outlook are made up of this sum total of preestablished notions.** Knowing someone's way of life, it is possible to guess what he is thinking at any given time, and how he will act in given situations.

The regulator of the active life is ***prudence***, **which is the same as reason, only it is at the service of the will.** In the intellectual sphere, reason makes the decisions—what something is from existing knowledge—while in the desiring and active spheres it determines how to do something in order to correctly attain what is rightly desired. When it learns to determine this properly, then a person always, or almost always, conducts his business successfully, and then we rightfully ascribe prudence to him. It is the ability to conduct business successfully, correctly perceiving means with their purposes, and acts in their outer circumstances.

From what you have been told, it will not be difficult for you to draw conclusions concerning the natural and correct activity of the will, which, as you see, is the mistress of all our powers and our life. Its occupation is to determine the way, method and measure of satisfaction of the desires, which are born by the needs, or which replace them, so that life may flow in a desirable manner, attaining peace and joy for the living being. We have, as was recollected, mental, physical, worldly and social needs and desires. They do not manifest themselves in everyone in the same way, because not everyone's life takes shape in the same way. A person's occupations will be determined by how he is able to and must satisfy his particular needs and desires in the situation peculiar to him, and how he is able to and must apply the suitable methods and conduct his life according to the situation. The task of the desiring or active aspect of our life is to conduct that life sober-mindedly in accordance with the established norm in all its affairs and undertakings. That would be proper. But try to understand and analyze what happens.

In the mental aspect, we have confusion, scattering and wandering of thoughts, while in the desiring aspect, we have inconstancy, disorder, and selfish desires, and we are preoccupied with them. How much time we spend in idleness and futility, we wander here and there, not knowing why we do such a thing; we do something and then we do it again, not knowing how to give a sensible account of our actions; we have one undertaking after another, and one occupation after another, but out of all of this comes only the crush of vanity. Desires are born; you cannot control them. "Give me, give me," they say. Sometimes they seem to be good, but at other times they are almost useless. How has this come to be? Our mistress, the will, has made her appearance. Look again, how many alien, troubling desires we have: anger, hate, envy, stinginess, vanity, pride and the like. The natural needs of the family and social life which has been established must be the source of such desires. But what is natural in these things? They only confuse what is natural and orderly in life. Where is this barbarous invasion from? I will leave this for you to ponder, and hasten to conclude this letter.

8.

THE HEART AND THE ASPECT OF SENSE

The aspect of sense—the heart. The profound significance of the heart in a man's life. The influence of the passions on the heart.

The Sensual Aspect: the Heart. Who is not aware of the great significance the heart has in our lives? Everything which enters the soul from the outside, and which is shaped by the intellectual and active aspects, falls into the heart; everything which the soul observes on the outside also passes through the heart. That is why it is called the center of life.

The heart's occupation is to sense everything concerning our person. It constantly and persistently senses the *condition of the soul and body,* and along with this the *various impressions* from the individual actions of the soul and body, from surrounding objects which it encounters, from the outward situation, and in general, from the course of life, thereby compelling and forcing man to furnish everything which is pleasant to it, and to avoid the unpleasant. The health and disease of the body, its vivacity and languor, fatigue and strength, liveliness and lethargy, along with what has been seen, heard, felt, smelled, tasted, and what has been recalled and imagined, what has been done, what one does and intends to do, what has been obtained and is being obtained, what may and may not be obtained, what is favorable to us or unfavorable, whether having to do with a person or concurrence of circumstances—all of this is reflected in the heart, and affects it either pleasantly or unpleasantly. Judging by this, it is impossible for it to be at rest for even a moment; instead, it is in a constant state of disturbance and flux, just like a barometer before a storm. But there is much that it senses that passes through without leaving a trace. This you may verify from instances, when we happen to be somewhere for the first time: everything in that place occupies our attention, but after the second or third time in that place, this is no longer so.

Every influence on the heart produces a unique feeling within it, but there are no words in our language for distinguishing these feelings. We express our feelings in general terms: pleasant–unpleasant; like–dislike; happy–bored; joy–grief; sorrow–pleasure; calm–anxiety; disappointment–satisfaction; fear–hope; apathy–sympathy. Observe yourself, and you will find first one feeling in the heart, then the other.

However, the significance of the heart in the economy of our life is not just to be passively subject to impressions, and to attest as to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction with our condition. The heart also maintains the energy of all powers of soul and body. Look how quickly something is accomplished when we have our heart in it! But when our heart is not in it, our hands drop and our legs do not move. That is why only those who know how to control themselves, when they encounter something which must be done, even if their heart is not in it, rush to find a pleasant side to it, and, having reconciled their heart to it, maintain within themselves the energy necessary to accomplish the task. Zeal, the motive force of the will, comes from the heart. This is also the case in mental work; a subject that has come to heart is discussed urgently and from every angle. In this case, thoughts occur by themselves, and work, no matter how long it takes, does not seem like work.

Not everyone likes everything, and not everyone has his heart equally in the same things; rather, some like one thing more, while others like something else. This comes about in this way; each person has his own taste. This depends in part on his natural predisposition, and in part—is this not the greater part?—on first impressions, impressions from his upbringing and happenstances of life. But no matter how tastes have formed, they compel a person to order his life in such a way as to surround himself with such objects and interrelationships as show his taste, and with which he is peaceful, being satisfied by them. The satisfaction of his heart's desires gives him calm, sweet calm, which also constitutes its own measure for every happiness. Nothing disturbs him; this is happiness.

If a person were to always maintain sobriety in his mental part, and prudence in his actions, then he would meet in life only the smallest number of occurrences unpleasant to his heart, and accordingly, would have a greater portion of happiness. But, as has been explained, the mental part rarely maintains itself worthily, giving itself over to idle dreams and distractions, while the active part deviates from its normal bent, being enticed by inconstant desires, which are aroused not by needs of nature, but by alien passions. That is why the heart has no rest, and, as long as these aspects are in such a state, it will not have any. The passions more than anything tyrannize the heart. If there were no passions, it would still meet with unpleasant things, of course, but they would never torment the heart in the same way the passions do. How anger consumes the heart! How hatred tears it! How evil envy grinds! How many disturbances and torments cause discontent or disgraceful conceit! How heavy lies grief when pride suffers! Indeed, if we were to examine a little more stringently, we would find that **every one of our disturbances and pains of the heart are from the passions.** These evil passions, when they are satisfied, give joy, but it is short-lived; and when they are not satisfied, but, on the contrary meet with opposition, then they give rise to long and unbearable grief.

In this way, it is apparent that **our heart really is the root and center of life.** By informing as to the good or bad state of a person, the heart rouses to action other forces, and then receives back into itself the actions of these forces, thereby intensifying or weakening that feeling, by which the person's state is determined. It would seem that the heart should be given complete power over even the running of one's life, as is indeed the case for many people; for many it has complete control, while for everyone else it has at least some. So it would seem—and maybe that was its original, natural function—but the passions arose and stirred up everything. In the presence of the passions, even our state is not reliably indicated by the heart, and impressions are not such as they should be, and tastes are distorted, and disturbances of other forces are headed in the wrong direction. That is why **we presently have the rule of restraining our hearts and subjecting its feelings, desires and inclinations to strict criticism. If someone should be cleansed of the passions, let him give the heart its will;** but as long as the passions are in force, to give the heart its will would mean to patently doom oneself to every sort of uncertainty. Worst of all is the behavior of those whose goal in life is to supply sweet pleasures to the heart and who aspire, as they say, to the good life. Since sweet desires and carnal and sensual pleasures make themselves strongly felt, such people are always falling into coarse sensuality, and they are beneath the feature which distinguishes man from other living creatures.

There is the soul and noetic life for you, from every one of its aspects! I purposely pointed out what is natural and proper for each aspect, and what is not. I see without reminding you a readiness within you to follow the former and shun the latter! Lord give the blessing!

9.

SPIRITUAL LIFE

The third realm of human life: spiritual life. The primary manifestations of the spiritual life: the fear of God, the conscience and longing for God. The dignity of man.

You write, "I tried to keep my thoughts on something substantial, but could not do it at all. I thought this was because I was unaccustomed to thinking. So I got a good book, hoping that with its help I would be able to keep my mind in the proper frame, but the result was the same. My mind always gets sidetracked, and always by trifling things. One day I sank into a reverie...was there ever a time when I have not done this? A friend brought me out of it by asking, 'What are you thinking about?' But I was not thinking, I was day-dreaming. That is how it has always been, but I never paid attention to it before. Now I see, and I see that this should not be the case; but just how should it be? I will never be able to control my thoughts."

I shall tell you how it should be later, but now I will ask you to add something to the observation you have made: Try for a single day to go without anger and vexation, and tell me how you manage.

Then you ask me a question, "You concluded, 'There is the soul and noetic life for you.' But you have not shown everything in the soul. You have not mentioned the virtues or anything about devotion, not a single word. But I see in our family, in our relatives and in many acquaintances, how these things occupy first place not only in word, but also in deed. How could they go without mention?"

I intended just now to write about this. I even wanted to say last time that I would write about it in this letter, but I thought it over and decided to wait and see how you would react to all that was said. So here is your question! I want to thank you for your serious consideration of what I suggested. This is indeed worthy of your well-formed little mind. What seemed to you to be an omission would have been entirely out of place. It is not the purpose of the soul to deal with such things. It is the purpose of the *spirit*, while the soul is exclusively devoted to the structuring of our temporal—that is, earthly—existence. And its knowledge is entirely built only on the foundation of that which gives experience, and its activity is devoted to the gratification of the needs of temporal life, and its senses are engendered and persist only from its visible states and conditions. Anything that is above this does not concern it. To be sure, some things occur in it which are above what has been said, but they are guests which drop in from a higher realm, the realm of the spirit.

Just what is the *spirit*? *It is that force which God breathed into man when He created him.* The earth bore all the species of earthly creatures by God's command. From the earth also came every kind of living creature's soul. The human soul, although it resembles the animal soul in its lowest part, is incomparably superior to it in its highest part. That it is this way in man is because of its bonding with the soul. The spirit, breathed by God, combined with it and raised it far above every nonhuman soul. **That is why we note within ourselves, in addition to what we see in the animals, that which is peculiar to the spiritualized soul of man, and even higher, that which is peculiar only to the spirit.**

The spirit, as a force which has come from God, knows God, seeks God, and in Him alone finds rest. With a certain innermost spiritual feeling attesting to its coming from God, the spirit feels its complete dependence on Him and acknowledges itself as obliged to pleasing God in everything and living only for Him and by Him.

More precise manifestations of these movements of the life of the spirit are: 1) The *fear of God.* All people, no matter what degree of development they are at, know that there is a Supreme Being, God, Who created everything, maintains everything and rules everything, and that they depend on Him in everything, that they must please Him, that He is the Judge and Requiter, Who gives to everyone according to his deeds. Such is the natural credo, which is inscribed in the spirit. By confessing it, the spirit venerates God and is filled with the fear of God. 2) **The *conscience.*** Acknowledging itself to be obliged to please God, the soul would not know how to satisfy this obligation, if the conscience did not rule it in this area. After imparting to the soul a particle of His omniscience in the natural credo He established, God inscribed in it the requirements of His holiness, truths and benevolence, having entrusted the soul itself to observe the implementation of them and to be its own judge as to right and wrong. This aspect of the soul is the conscience, which indicates what is right and wrong, what is pleasing to God and what is displeasing, what should be done and what should not be. Once it has indicated these things, it must authoritatively carry them out, and then reward implementation with comforting, and punish non-implementation with remorse. The conscience is the legislator, the guardian of the law, the judge and the executor. It is the natural codex of God's commandments, which are incumbent on all people. And we see the action of the conscience along with the fear of God in all people. 3) The *longing for God.* This is expressed in the universal yearning for the supreme good, and is more clearly seen also in the universal dissatisfaction with everything created. What does this dissatisfaction signify? It signifies that nothing created is capable of satisfying the spirit. The spirit comes from God, it seeks God, it wants to taste Him and, abiding in the living communion and bond with Him, it rests in Him. When it attains this, it is at peace, and, until it has attained it, it cannot have peace. No matter how many creature comforts and blessings a person has, he has very little. Everyone, as you have already noticed, is always seeking. They seek and find something, but after they have found it, they cast it aside and start seeking all over again, so that they may once again cast away what they find. So it goes on endlessly. This means that they are seeking the wrong thing in the wrong place, and not what they should be seeking, and not where they should be seeking it. Isn't this tangible proof that there is a force in us drawing us away from the earth and earthly sorrows towards Heaven?

I am not giving you a detailed explanation of all these manifestations of the spirit, I am just directing your thoughts toward the spirit's presence in us, and ask you to think it over a little more to convince yourself fully that there is a spirit within us. For the distinguishing feature of man is within it. The human soul makes us a little above the animals, while the spirit makes us a little below the angels. You of course understand the sense of the various phrases we have such as the "spirit of a writer," the "spirit of a people," and so forth. It is the sum total of distinguishing characteristics—actual ones, but to some extent ideal ones, with the sense of being ascertainable, elusive and intangible. The "human spirit" is the same way; the "spirit of a writer," on the other hand, is seen purely as something which is idealized, while the human spirit is present within a person as a living force, with viable and sensual movements attesting to its presence.

From what has been said, I hope that you will come to the following conclusion: A person in whom there is no motion and action of spirit does not stand on the level of human dignity.

10.

FAITH IN THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The universality of faith in the existence of God as a manifestation of spiritual life.

You ask, "How can you say that everyone has a spirit with the manifestations you mentioned? Also, are there not peoples who do not know God?" These peoples do not know the true God, but they do know He exists; everyone confesses this. Believing there is a God, and wishing to define more precisely that He exists, they have gone astray and called God that which is not God: Some call the sun God, others the moon or stars, others say something else. Not everyone, however, has strayed so grossly. When God scattered the peoples on the face of the earth after the tower of Babel, they carried with them what were up to that time traditional, sensible concepts of God as the invisible Spirit, Creator, Providence, Judge, and Requiter. All hold Him to be the Creator, Providence and Requiter; but not all hold Him to be an immaterial Spirit, instead, *(they) changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to the birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things* (Romans 1:23). *When they knew God*, that is, knew that God exists, *they glorified Him not as God* (Romans

1:21). Of the eastern peoples, the Persians and Indians, both Asian and American, have the most elevated concept of God. The Greeks and Romans belittled God, so to speak. The American Indians, for example, call God the Universal Spirit; invisible, all-embracing. This is a very lofty notion, and in and of itself, it cannot be carried further than this. The Asian Indians went deeper in their comprehension of God; but, after maintaining the concept of His invisibility, all-powerfulness and activity in everything, they intended to define His creative and industrious activities more precisely, and came up with a lot of concepts that had no foundation, and wrote a lot of fantastic stories.

So it is in this sense that there are people who do not know God! Not in the sense that there are people who do not believe in the existence of God. Some travellers have claimed that they encountered peoples who did not know God at all and did not venerate Him. Most likely, they just did not hear a confession of faith or see any worship of God, and in order to have ascertained one way or the other, they should have stayed among these peoples longer. Becker, in our own day, lived for an entire month among such a people near a lake through which the Nile flows. He says he saw no worship of any deity until the new moon came, when he saw the king and all the elders preparing a bull. The designated day arrived, and they went to some hillock, leading the bull to the sacrifice. "If I had left two or three days earlier," says Becker, "I could have said in all sincerity that this people does not worship God."

Thus, put entirely out of your mind the idea that there are people who do not acknowledge the existence of God. There are some scientists who think they can do without God, and who talk and write books as if He did not exist. But while their tongues and pens weave such empty words, their hearts say something else. They make themselves out to be nonbelievers, but very uncertainly, so as to successfully get away with it in their own conscience.

Knowing God, everyone has a conscience, honors God and prays to Him, and believes in the future life, in which everyone will receive according to his deeds. **The spirit is the force that sustains all such beliefs and convictions.** We will assume that within each person is a spirit, the highest aspect of human life. It is the force that draws that person from the visible to the invisible, from the temporal to the eternal, from the creation to the Creator; it is the characteristic of man that distinguishes him from all the other living creatures on earth. It is possible to weaken this force to varying degrees, or to pervert its requirements, but it is not possible to utterly suppress it or annihilate it. It is an integral part of our human nature, and manifests itself in each person in its own way.

You led me to speak in this way by your question. No harm done. I wanted to write to you anyway, not about this, but about what happened and what happens in the soul from the influence of the spirit by its binding with the soul. That will be for next time.

II.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRIT ON THE SOUL

The influence of the spirit on the soul of mankind and the manifestation produced by it in the sphere of the intellectual, the active sphere (depending on the will) and the sensual (the heart).

I will take up where I left off, that is, with what happened to the soul as a result of its union with the spirit, which is from God. From this union, the entire soul was transformed from being an animal soul, which it is by nature, into a human soul,

having those forces and actions indicated previously. But that is not the subject of our discussion now. **The human soul, being such as has been described, displays aspirations above all this and rises a step further, because it is an inspired soul.**

Such inspirations are apparent in every aspect of the soul's life, the intellectual, active and sensual.

In the *mental* part, the *yearning* for the *ideal* in the soul appears from the action of the spirit. In fact, the entire process of the intellect is guided by experience and observation. From what it learns haphazardly and disconnectedly by this method, the soul forms generalizations, draws conclusions, and thus obtains basic suppositions about a known sphere of things. This would be what it stands on. At the same time, it is never satisfied with this, but strives higher, seeking to define the *significance of each sphere of things* in the overall sum of creation. For example, we know what man is from observations of him, generalizations about him and conclusions we have made. Not being content with this, however, we come up with the question, "What is the significance of man in the sum of creation?" In trying to discover this, one person decides that man is the head and crown of creation. Another decides that he is the high priest, in the sense that the voices of all creation praise God instinctively, while man raises praise to the Creator Above All with rational song. The soul is inclined to generate concepts of this type, both concerning every other type of creature, and concerning creation as a whole. So does it generate. Whether these concepts correspond to reality or not is another question, but without a doubt the soul is inclined to seek these concepts; it seeks and generates them. This, then, is the yearning for the ideal, for the meaning of a thing is its idea.

This yearning is universal to everyone. Even those who do not place any value on any kind of knowledge other than that from experience, without noticing it are unable to refrain from idealizing against their will. They reject ideas with their tongues, but build them in actual fact. They accept conjectures, which are the lowest class of knowledge, but without which we could not have a single domain of knowledge.

Metaphysics and true philosophy, which have always been and always will be in the realm of human knowledge, are the ideal manner of viewing things. The spirit which is ever present within us as a significant force, itself contemplating God as Creator and Providence, also draws the soul into that invisible and boundless realm. Perhaps the spirit, by its Divine likeness, was intended to contemplate all things in God: it would do so, if there had been no Fall. But nowadays it is necessary for anyone who wishes to contemplate all reality ideally to proceed from God or from that Credo, which was written by God in the spirit. Thinkers who do not do this by this very fact are not philosophers. Not believing the ideas constructed by the soul on the foundation of inspirations of the spirit, they act unjustly by not believing that this is what makes up the composition of the spirit, for the one thing is man's work, while the other is God's.

In the *active* part, it is from the action of the soul that there appears *desire for and production of unselfish deeds* or virtues, or even higher than these—the yearning to become virtuous. Properly, the work of the soul in this part (the will) is the establishment of temporal living conditions for man, so that he will be well-off. In fulfilling this function, the soul does everything according to the conviction that what is being done is either pleasant, or beneficial, or necessary for the living conditions which are being established. At the same time, it is not satisfied with this, but goes out of this domain and carries out deeds and undertakings, not at all because they are necessary, beneficial or pleasant, but because they are good, virtuous and just, striving towards them with all zeal, in spite of the fact that they contribute nothing toward temporal life and are even unpleasant for it, and misfortunes occur on account of them. In some people, such yearnings are manifested with such force that they sacrifice all comforts of life in order to live in renunciation of everything. Manifestations of these yearnings are everywhere, even outside of Christianity. Where do they come from? From the spirit.

The standard of the holy, virtuous and righteous life is inscribed in the conscience. Once it has received information about such a life through its binding with the spirit, the soul is drawn by its invisible beauty and majesty, and it decides to introduce it into the domain of its deeds and into its own life, transforming even this according to its requirements. And everyone is sympathetic towards such yearnings, although not everyone wholly gives himself over to them; **but there is not a single human being who has not at some time or other devoted his labors and substance to deeds in such a spirit.**

In the *sensual* part of the soul, there appears a *yearning and love for the beautiful.* The proper work of this part is to perceive in the soul through the senses either its own pleasant or unpleasant condition, and influences from the outside, according to the measurement of gratification or non-gratification of mental-corporeal requirements. But we see in the realm of the senses along with these mercenary senses—we will call them such—a number of selfless feelings, which arise completely apart from the gratification or non-gratification of requirements; they are feelings from delight in the beautiful. The eye does not want to tear itself away from the flower and the ear does not want to tear itself from the song, only because the one and the other are beautiful. Everyone arranges and decorates his living area in a certain way, because that way is more beautiful to him. We go for a walk and select a place for the single reason that it is beautiful. Above all this is the enjoyment received from paintings, works of sculpture, music and singing, and even higher than this, the enjoyment received from poetry. Works of fine art are delightful not just for the beauty of outward form, but more particularly for the beauty of inward composition, the intellectual-contemplative beauty, ideal beauty. Where do such phenomena come from in the soul? These are visitors from another realm, from the realm of the spirit. The spirit, which knows God, naturally comprehends Divine beauty and seeks to delight in it alone. The spirit cannot definitively prove what Divine beauty is, but, by carrying within itself the design of it, it definitively proves what it *is not*, expressing this evidence by the fact that it is not satisfied by anything which is created. To contemplate Divine beauty, to partake of it and delight in it, is a requirement of the spirit, and is its life, the Paradisal life. Having received information about Divine beauty through its binding with the spirit, the soul too follows in its steps, and, comprehending Divine beauty by means of its own mental image, it leaps with joy because within its realm it is presented with the reflection of that Divine beauty (delights), then itself devises and manufactures things in which it hopes to reflect it as it is presented to it (artists and actors). That is where these guests come from—delightful, estranged from everything sensual, elevating the soul up to the spirit and spiritualizing it! I would note that, concerning artistic works, I am including in this class only those works in which the Divine beauty of invisible Divine things serves as the content, and not those works which, although they are beautiful, all the same represent ordinary, mental-corporeal life or those very things which constitute everyday circumstances of that life. **The soul seeks not only what is beautiful, being guided by the spirit, but also the expression of the beautiful in beautiful forms of the invisible world, to where the spirit by its action beckons.**

So is the soul inspired by what the spirit has given it by being bound with it! I do not think that anything from this is difficult for you; I would ask, however, that you not just skim over what I have written, but that you examine it carefully, and apply it to yourself. Is your soul inspired? After all, you are a singer and musician! Sometime you and I will critique your view, according to the procedures we have established, as to what the fine arts represent.

12.

THE SUPREMACY OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

The conclusions of what was said about the realms of human life. The possibility of movement from one realm to another and the predominance of one or another aspect of life. The predominance of the intellectual and carnal as a sinful state. The supremacy of spiritual life as the norm of the true life of man.

At this point, let us take account of, or draw conclusions from, all that has been said. You can see how many aspects—or better, how many degrees—there are to our lives! There is the aspect or degree of the spiritual life; there is that of the spiritual–intellectual; there is the exclusively intellectual; there is the intellectual–physical (it seems that I have not described this properly. To this combination belong observations with the imagination and memory, desires arising from physical needs, and sensations of bodily conditions and impressions); and there is the physical. There are five layers in all, but one person in man, and this one person lives first one life, then another, then a third life. Judging by this, a person receives a particular character according to the kind of life he lives, and this character is reflected in his views and attitudes, his habits, and his feelings. That is, his life is either spiritual, with spiritual views, habits and feelings; or it is intellectual, with intellectual concepts, habits and feelings; or it is carnal, with carnal thoughts, deeds and feelings. (I am not taking into consideration the states in between—the intellectual–spiritual, or the intellectual–physical, because I do not want too many categories). **This does not mean that when a man is spiritual that the intellectual and physical have no place in him, but only that the spiritual predominates, subordinating to itself and penetrating the intellectual and the physical parts.** Equally, it does not mean that when a man is intellectual that his spiritual and physical parts no longer exist; rather, when the intellectual predominates, it rules everything and gives its tone to everything and envelops the spiritual with the cover of intellect. Neither does it mean that when a man is carnal that his spiritual and intellectual parts no longer exist; rather, that everything about him becomes carnal, both the spiritual and the intellectual parts become carnal, subordinated to the flesh and trampled by it and held in its bondage.

No matter which degree a person is at, other aspects of his life remain inherent within him. He is not so enslaved at any one degree that he could not be freed from its bondage, but always has the opportunity to change from one degree to another, after he has weakened one aspect of his life and strengthened another. Thus, even a spiritual man may fall into intellectuality and carnality, and the carnal man may rise up to spirituality, when the former becomes enamored of the intellectual and the carnal, and the latter of the spiritual life. Man is always free. Freedom is given to him along with consciousness of self, and together they constitute the essence of the spirit and the standard of humanity. Extinguish freedom and consciousness of self, and you extinguish the spirit, and man is no longer man.

However, while I maintain that man has the freedom to move up or down along the degrees of his life, I do not at the same time maintain that it is possible to move with equal ease and comfort when going from top to bottom, or from bottom to top, or that these movements may be carried out within a man as quickly as going from one room to another, as we do numerous times each day. I only want to say with this, that man, who is fully conscious of himself, and who is free, is the guilty party in his inner state, and, if he has fallen into an opprobrious state, and remains in it, then he alone is guilty, and he is answerable to God and man for it.

Each of the degrees or manifestations of our lives which has been shown is natural in us, and consequently, cannot be disapproved in and of itself. The condition that is unnatural, and consequently, is in and of itself opprobrious, is that in which the thoughts stray, steam and seethe, and in which the desires are inconstant, being stirred by the passions. The passions are not natural to us, but alien; and the emotions of the heart are agitated and disturbed by reason of these very passions. I intentionally depicted these unnatural things within us while speaking of the mental life, in order to fix your attention on them. I intentionally mention this now, also in order to force you to understand the matter a little better, and to deal with it accordingly. The straying of thoughts, inconstancy of passionate desires and uneasiness of the heart constantly disturb us, not allowing us to do a single thing as we should, and nearly always leading us astray. This illness, although it is universal and endemic, is not natural; rather, it is contracted by us willfully. The enemy knows how much this aids him, and when attempting to entice someone, he first tries to push him into the whirlpool; that is, first of all he enters into the stream of thoughts, beneath these thoughts he kindles passionate desires, and with these he agitates the heart.

A person in whom temptation has ripened is led to this point. If he does not come to his senses, he falls. After he has fallen, he is drawn into a whirlpool of turbulent motion of thoughts, desires and emotions, sometimes for a short time, sometimes for a long time, and not infrequently forever. Such a life, a portion of which, you remember, you experienced, is passed entirely within this whirlpool, and, judging from the various groups, in some places it is more turbulent, in others a little quieter; in some places more humble, in others in an upheaval in all its nakedness and shamefulness. Even aside from this, it is rare for a person to be free from all inner turbulence. Sooner or later he will break down. I do not know if anyone is free from this straying of thoughts and notions. Please take note of this illness of ours (actually, by complaining about the irrepressibility of the thoughts, you have already noted it in part). Once it has been noted, you get down to the labor of healing. Do not put entirely out of your mind the idea that within you there is always present something which is not good, which is always ready to divert you from the right way and to mislead you.

As for the intellectual and physical parts, they are, as we have already noted, in and of themselves sinless, and natural to us; but the man who has been shaped by the intellectual, or even worse, by the carnal, is not sinless. He is guilty of granting supremacy within himself to something that was not meant for supremacy, and that is supposed to be in a subordinate position. It turns out that although the intellectual is natural, for a man to be intellectual is unnatural; in the same way carnality is natural, but for a man to be carnal is unnatural. The error here is in the exclusive predominance of that which is supposed to be subordinate.

When the spiritual reigns supreme in someone, then although this is his exclusive character and attitude, he does not err. This is because, in the first place, **spirituality is the norm of human life**, and so as a result, being spiritual, he is a real person, whereas the intellectual or carnal man is not a real person. Secondly, no matter how spiritual someone is, he cannot help but give the intellectual and carnal their rightful place; he maintains just a little of them, in subordination to the spirit. Let intellectuality be not too broad within him (in scientific knowledge, arts and other subjects), and let carnality be firmly restrained—then he is a real, whole person. But the man of intellect (the expert, the connoisseur, the shrewd man)—and even more so the carnal man—is not a real person, no matter how appealing he seems outwardly. He is foolish. Hence the simple man who fears God is superior to the man who is diverse and elegant, but who does not have among his goals and yearnings the pleasing of God. You may judge in the same way about works of literature and art. Works in which everything is carnal are completely bad; those in which intellectuality is supreme also do not answer their purpose, although they are higher than the carnal. This judgment concerns those works that have no spiritual elements; those that are directly hostile toward all that is spiritual, that is, toward God and all Divine things, are direct suggestions of the enemy and should not be tolerated.

From this you see that **according to natural purpose, man must live in the spirit, subordinate everything to the spirit, be penetrated by the spirit in all that is of the soul,** and even more so in all that is physical—and beyond these, in the outward things, too, that is, family and social life. This is the norm!

I will not try to persuade you to live in the spirit and subordinate everything to it, supposing that if you have thoroughly examined everything that has been said, that the determination to live in this way already exists within you. You have already expressed the firm desire to stand on the level of human life as it is intended to be. You see now what it is intended to be, and of course, you wish it to be so. Yes, indeed, you have lived up to now in your family and circle of relatives in the manner depicted, that is, according to the spirit, although you have studied sciences, know how to run a household, and are a master of music and singing. You do not have to be concerned with establishing the spiritual within yourself, but rather with supporting and maintaining it, protecting yourself from the influences and attractions of the intellectual–carnal life, into whose whirlpool you began to fall. This is the very thing we had agreed to discuss. Of course, you are awaiting a solution as soon as possible to the question of how this life is to be.

13.

LIFE ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT

The true happiness of man is life according to the spirit. The subtle covering of the soul which serves as an intermediary between it and the body and as a means of communication of souls between themselves and with the world of saints and angels. The radiant and the dark state of the covering of the soul.

I wanted to answer the question at the end of the last letter, but your name day was approaching, and I thought I would send you my best wishes on the occasion.

I wish you above all good health, because that is the precondition for obtaining every blessing which man considers to be a blessing, and the delight and enjoyment of those blessings. Really, for a sick and feeble person, which pleasures are possible, when all the senses are in an abnormal state? An exception should be made only for spiritual comforts. They do not depend in such a way on the state of one's health, and they may be present even in spite of bodily sufferings. Martyrs, while undergoing the very process of martyrdom, truly rejoiced; actively, and not just with their tongues did they express their rejoicing.

What should I wish you next? Usually one is wished happiness at this point. So I, too, wish you happiness. Just why do we wish this? Indeed, no one to this day has defined what happiness is, or who is truly happy. As I understand it, whoever considers himself to be happy is happy. Therefore, by wishing you happiness, I am also wishing you this. I wish you always to consider yourself to be happy! Why do I wish this? People have so many different conceptions and tastes concerning this, that you cannot make anything of it. But I would say to you confidentially, that *as long as you are not living in the spirit, do not expect happiness.* Intellectual and physical life, when the course is favorable, give something like happiness, but it is a fleeting illusion of happiness, and soon vanishes. Moreover, in their presence is a stormy area formed between soul and body by passionate thoughts, desires and aroused feelings; it is always powerful. With its presence, by reason of the poison of the passions, the only possibility is intoxication, which forgets suffering, the same as from opium; this forgetfulness of suffering does not come as the result of the absence of passions and sickness of heart. Sickness of heart constitutes an integral part of life in this world. The spirit however, soars beyond the boundaries of all troubles and carries away the person who abides in the spirit, and, by allowing him to taste its blessings, which are ever present, makes him truly and completely happy.

Well, then, shall I conclude my well-wishing with this? No, I do not think that is enough. If our life ended with this life, then, of course, it would be sufficient to say, "Be healthy and happy." As it does not end in this way, but continues even beyond the grave, and there only is the true life to be found, then, for the sake of completeness in my well-wishing, I cannot but wish that you be considered worthy and be blessed there. May you be blessed in that place. With all my heart I wish you this, and diligently pray to the Lord: may He bring you the true life by trouble-free means, and after that establish you in His ever blessed kingdom.

With this, of course, there arise very harsh conditions in your consciousness. There are, of course, crucial conditions, but are they really harsh? I will make a general comment on this for the time being: yes and no, judging by how an individual is set from childhood, and judging by that, I would say that for you, they are not very harsh. You are already carrying them out. Just be on your guard and do not retreat.

Another thought has come to me, to send you candy on your nameday, but I do not know if I can get any. I will try.

In case you have not forgotten, at one time I began talking with you about an exceedingly subtle element that is finer than light. It is called ether. Let us suppose that it exists as a matter of fact, and not just in name. I recognize that such a very subtle element exists, and that it penetrates and passes everywhere, serving as the smallest particle of material substance. Along with this, I suppose that within this element soar all the blessed spirits—the angels and Divine saints—who are themselves garbed in a kind of raiment made of that very same element. The covering of our soul (understand this word to refer also to the spirit, which is the soul of our human soul) is also made of this very same element. The soul itself is the immaterial spirit; but its covering is made from this ethereal immaterial element. Our bodies are coarse; but that covering of the soul is very fine and serves as the intermediary between the soul and body. Through it the soul acts on the body and the body on the soul. I am speaking of this only in passing, however. Just keep in mind that the soul has this very fine covering, and that our souls have the very same kind of covering as do all spirits. From this it will not be hard for you to conclude that this omnipresent element, very fine, out of which these coverings are made and in which

all spirits soar, is the intermediary for the intermingling of our souls and these spirits.

For right now, tear yourself away from this idea, and turn your attention to our usual matters. You are presently living in Moscow, you are sitting within the walls of your apartment, you are surrounded by buildings everywhere, and no matter where you turn your eyes, you meet obstructions everywhere. Many things impede your keen vision and far-sighted view. If you were to rise above Moscow in some sort of balloon, however, you would see not only the entire city without impediment, but also its environs. If you were to rise even higher, then you would see even further all around. Sharpen your sight and rise higher and higher: You can see St. Petersburg, Paris, London, etc. All of this is because your vision has become keen, and there are no obstacles to what it sees.

Let us return again to the Divine saints. The element of which we are speaking is everywhere, and meets no obstacle to itself anywhere. Sunlight passes through glass; while the element can also pass through glass, it also permeates walls, the ground and everything else. Just as it is able to pass through everything, so are those who soar in it able to pass through everything, when that is necessary (just as the Savior passed through into the room when the Apostles were behind a locked door). **They occupy a definite space, but when they are enjoined to do so or are permitted, they are immediately transferred to wherever it is necessary by means of the element, and not only do they meet no obstacles, they do not even see them.** When necessary, they are transferred, but when it is not necessary, they stay in their own space and see in every direction what is there and what is happening there. When their eyes turn toward earth, that is, toward us sinners, they see us clearly, too. Not our coarse bodies, because that is not how they see us. Rather, they see our very souls, as they are. They do not see directly, but by means of the soul's covering, which is like their own, and like the element in which they live, because the state of the soul is accurately reflected by its covering.

Imagine, if you will now, that two people are sitting and talking. During this, the soul of each person has its own disposition. Neither one sees what is in the soul of the other on account of the coarse covering of the body, beneath which the soul is concealed. The angels and saints, however, if they were to gaze upon them, would see their souls as they are and what is within them, because the state they are in, and that which is in them, are reflected in their souls' covering. If within the soul are holy thoughts and feelings, then its covering is bright; with each holy feeling the brightness has its own character. But if the thoughts and feelings are not quite pure, then the soul's covering is likewise not bright, and each impure feeling has its own characteristic gloom, which is sometimes like fog, at other times like the gloom of night. Suppose you were to rise up to heaven and perceive with angelic vision (after taking on, of course, an angelic body). Then, having turned your gaze upon the earth, you would see among the varied masses of people bright shades, semi-bright, hazy, murky. It would not be at all surprising if those who were brightly dressed seemed gloomy to you, if their souls were bad, while those in tatters would seem bright, if their souls were pure. This is how the heavenly inhabitants see us, and judging by what they see, they rejoice or grieve over us.

Allow me to ask you how the saint whose name you bear sees you, especially at present, when she is looking after you more attentively, because you turn to her more fervently? How does your Guardian Angel see you, and the Lord Himself, Who sits with a body at the right hand of the Father, but Who has promised to be with us also at all times? How they see you is what you are in fact. I am hesitant, because I do not want to trouble you and darken your holiday with such a question; on the contrary, I wish to bring you spiritual comfort and joy. For I cannot imagine that you are viewed from heaven as murky or gloomy. You still have not had time to become gloomy, and so you have a bright appearance. My sincere wish to you on your nameday is that you always be that way, so that the inhabitants of heaven see you as being bright. Then from this life you will go directly to them. That is what I wish for you with all my heart.

14.

THE COVERING OF THE SOUL

The covering of the soul becomes bright or dark corresponding to the inner condition of the soul. Examples. The demons see a darkened soul.

I would like to add some additional comments to the preceding discussion, and speak further on the same subject. I will relate to you several experiences showing that the soul in its covering adopts precisely the appearance which corresponds to its inner attitude. During the life of St. Andrew the Fool-for-Christ, there was a hieromonk who was a faster, a solitary and a man of prayer. Everyone honored him, that is, they held him in reverence. But when St. Andrew met him, he saw that he was arrayed in some sort of dark fog, and that around his neck was curled a snake with the inscription "snake of avarice." Such was the soul that he had! However, no one could see it. The enlightened spiritual eyes of St. Andrew saw.[1] But the eyes of the heavenly inhabitants are even more enlightened. Thus, while we think that no one sees what we are, we are seen by a countless number of eyes. See how many stars there are in the sky! The number of eyes which look upon us is greater still.

---

[1] St. Andrew spoke with this priest in private, brought him to repentance, and the priest corrected himself.

Indeed, we ourselves are able, if not to see, then to determine what we are. Our conscience, the incorruptible judge, tells us. It may become suppressed with time, but it always manages to free itself from this yoke, and raises its voice even in those who are shameless. In those who are innocent, its voice is always pure and like a bell. The conscience is also known as the divine voice in the human spirit. In it is also reflected whatever opinion or view the inhabitants of heaven have of us. Thus, when the conscience says we are pure in everything before God and man, then this testimony of the conscience reflects the light near our soul, and everyone in heaven sees us as bright. If the conscience reproaches us, however, telling us that we are impure, then we appear dark. But the guardian angels are closer to us than anyone, and they know who is dark and who is bright, and are able to judge by the inner attitude whether it is a permanent or temporary condition.

Besides the angels and saints, there are dark powers that are invisible to us that also see. However, when the soul is bright, they are unable to look at it, like bats who fear the light. They look at it only when it begins to darken. They run in packs everywhere, and as soon as they notice a darkened soul, they immediately fall upon it, and begin to twist it to and fro with thoughts, passionate desires and disturbance of feelings. The turbulent realm that I described, saying that it lawlessly establishes itself between the soul and body, is the place where demons sit next to the soul and begin to stir it up, just like dust by wind. They even attempt to creep up to bright souls, but are parried and struck down by rays of light, as if by an arrow. In Antioch there lived a magician named Cyprian. A youth asked him to use his magic to win for him the favor of Justina, an exemplary Christian, whom he wanted to make his wife, but she would not even look at him. Cyprian sent demons who were in his service to her several times. These demons were supposed to use their particular means to kindle within her love for the youth, but whenever they approached her residence, they were unable to enter it. Turning back, they claimed that they were repulsed and scorched by a light from within: for this Justina was arrayed with light, as if enveloped by some sort of cloud, and they were unable to see her.[1]

What better example is there of a soul so bright, than when it is Christian, pure in conscience and devoted to the Lord? When the conscience is pure, the fear of God fills the soul and keeps it inviolable. Then the Lord Himself, Who is everywhere and fills all things, visits that soul, and it becomes a light and shines like a small star.

If it has maintained such purity and brightness, then the soul, upon its departure from the body, crosses over to that light, by means of that very same brightness. Once St. Anthony was conversing with his disciples, and spied a band of light that rose up to the heavens. After looking into it and discerning what it was, he said, "It is Saint Ammon ascending into heaven with the angels escorting him."

So be zealous about this. Do not go by your outer appearance, for it is possible that there is something else visible in us, and that is what we are in reality. Of course, it could be better than what we appear to be. I recall the words of Basil the Great, who says, "The body is *ours*; besides this body, what we have, beginning with our clothing, is that which *surrounds* us. But what are we? We are a soul (with a spirit)." So after disengaging oneself from all that is outside of one's self and from the body itself, one must gather one's self and enter within, and examine

---

1. What happened further does not concern us here. Both the youth and the magician turned to Christ. See the *Menaion*. (The *Chet'ya-Minei*, which is equivalent to the proper of the saints in the West—Translator)

everything briefly and decide...just what are you, matushka, my dearest?

This brings us back to the point from which we deviated just a little, that is, to the decision: Just how is one to be in order to live in the spirit and inspirit the soul and body and all that is exterior to one? We will talk about this another time.

15.

HOW THE SAINTS HEAR OUR PRAYERS

How the saints hear our prayers. An additional note concerning prayer.

I am very glad you liked what I said about *that* element. Accept it, imprint it in your mind more firmly, and always keep it in your thought. You will see how it will help you in everything. How many things it explains, and how much comfort it gives!

You have probably heard the question as to how the saints hear our prayers, and maybe you yourself have asked the same thing. In answer to this, there are explanations, and there are explanations—but the question still remains a question. In my own opinion, by supposing the existence of an element such as I described, how can the saints not hear our prayers? Do you know how the electric telegraph works? In St. Petersburg, for example, they start up a particular piece of equipment; in the same instant, that action in St. Petersburg is reflected in a similar piece of equipment in Moscow, and the very same motion occurs. Why does it happen like this? Because the equipment is of the same type, and because the wire connecting them is fitted to them. The action of the telegraph is like our prayer. We, along with the saints, are like two pieces of the same kind of equipment, and the medium in which the saints dwell and with which our souls are surrounded...that is the wire. When true prayer—that is, sincere prayer—moves in the soul, then that prayer, by means of the action of the element upon it, flies as if on a beam of light to the saints, and tells them what we want and what we are praying about. There is no gap between the time we make our prayer and when it is heard; the only necessity is that it come from our heart. It is our telegraphic line to Heaven. The very same prayers, which are not from our heart, but which come only from our head and tongue, do not produce a ray which rises to heaven, and they are not audible there. Those are not even prayers, but only prayer-like modes.

Maybe you have experienced proof of what has been said without even noticing it. You write how you prayed fervently, and that you calmed down immediately after receiving the inner assurance that you would be delivered from what was troubling you, and then in fact this came about. It turns out, then, that my comparison with the telegraph of heart-felt prayer rising up invisibly to heaven through the element is accurate. From your heart came a bolt or ray to Heaven; along that same path, or along a similar one, there came a ray from Heaven in answer to what you needed. That is what always happens with all prayers that come from the heart. The ability to pray in such a manner does not always come about immediately, but the hearing of it does.

Do not be smug about what happened. May the Lord grant that it happen for you more often. Remember how you prayed at that moment, and try always to pray like that, from the heart, not just uttering something with the tongue and thinking something with the mind.

If you will do it this way, then you will have a working solution to the question of how one is to be in order to live in the spirit. For such prayer is the life of the spirit. Here the spirit dwells in God and unites with Him, and in this is the entire force of its life. Know then, that the soul lives only when it prays in such a way as you prayed at that time. When there is no such prayer, it means that the soul has stopped, if it has not become completely deadened.

I will not hide from you the fact that even though you were able to pray that way once, you will hardly be able to pray like that all the time. God grants such kind of prayer, or the Guardian Angel stimulates it. It comes and goes. It does not follow from this, however, that we are permitted to abandon our labor of prayer. **Prayer comes to someone who labors at it, but it will not come to anyone who does not work at it. We see that the Holy Fathers labored a great deal at prayer, and by these very labors kindled within themselves a prayerful spirit.** That is how they reached this prayerful spirit, the image of which they have left us in their writings. Everything said by them on this subject comprises a science of prayer, which is the science of sciences. The time is coming when we will go over it, but for now I have touched upon it only in passing. I would also add that there is nothing more important than prayer. Therefore, it is necessary to labor in it most diligently and more than anything else. May the Lord grant you diligence in such labor.

Your humble thoughts and feelings about yourself are angelic feelings. How perfect and light are the angels! But they are all humble, more humble than any person. A humble soul is always bright. The darkening of the soul begins when it begins to think about itself a lot, for such a thing is of the dark forces. May God grant that you never lose such feelings, so that you may always be in the light.

Once again we have strayed from our question. Just be patient a little longer.

16.

THE TRUE GOAL OF LIFE

The true goal of life. One's manner of life corresponds to the goal.

What has happened to you? What kinds of questions are these? "I do not know what to do with my life. Should I be doing something in particular? Should I define some particular purpose for myself?" I read this and I was dumfounded; where could such odd thoughts have come from? Indeed, you already settled all of this when you expressed the desire to stand at the level of human dignity, as God intended it to be. What have we been talking about, if not that! Where did these problems come from?! I would guess that among your friends are progressive thinkers, or that you have joined a society having such people in it, and they have scattered your good sense. Such people usually rave in this manner. Phrases such as "the good of mankind" and "the good of the people" are always on their tongues. Probably you, after hearing so many profound ideas, were captivated by them, and when you turned your eyes to your real life, you saw with regret that you had vegetated in your family circle without benefit or purpose. Oh! Only now has someone opened your eyes!

If my guess is correct, then you owe me an apology, because you said nothing about this, even though you gave your promise to write about everything honestly. Whether this is the case or not, I cannot put your problems aside without offering a solution. Our entire discussion will serve as the complete solution. For right now I will tell you only briefly a general thought, so you may see that the life you have lived up to this point, and that you are now living, is the true life, and there is nothing in it that needs to be changed.

One needs to know for certain the exact purpose of life. Is this wise, however? For is it not already certain? The general assumption is that, because there is a life beyond the grave, the purpose of the true life, without exception, must be there, and not here. This assumption is known to everyone, and there is no reason to go into it, although in practice, it is remembered least of all. But make it a rule for your own life to pursue this purpose with all your strength; you will see for yourself what light will emanate from there onto your short sojourn on the earth and onto your affairs. The first thing that will be opened will be the conviction that here on earth there are only the means to that other life. There is a single rule concerning these means: To make use of these means, and to use them in such a way that they guide you toward your purpose and do not detract you from it, and are not at cross-purposes to it. So there is the solution to your puzzle, "I do not know what to do with my life." Look to Heaven, and measure every step of your life so that it is a step towards it. It seems to me that it is so simple and at the same time comprehensive.

You ask, "Shouldn't I be doing something?" Of course that is necessary. Do whatever falls to your hands, in your circle and in your situation—and believe that this is and will be your true work; nothing more from you is required. It is a great error to think that you must undertake important and great labors, whether for heaven, or, as the progressives think, in order to make one's contribution to humanity. That is not necessary at all. It is necessary only to do everything in accordance with the Lord's commandments. Just exactly what is to be done? Nothing in particular, just that which presents itself to each one according to the circumstances of his life, and which is demanded by the individual events with which each of us meets.

That is all. God arranges the lot of each person, and the entire course of life of each one is also His all-good industry, as is each moment and each meeting. Let us take an example: A poor man comes to us; God has brought him. What are you supposed to do? Help him. God, Who has brought this poor man to you, with the desire, of course, that you act toward this poor man in a manner pleasing to Him, looks at you, to see how you will in fact act. He will be pleased if you help. Will you help? You will have done what is pleasing to God, and will have made a big step towards the final goal: reward in Heaven. If you generalize this instance, you will come to the conclusion that in all instances, and during each meeting, it is necessary to do what God wants us to do. As to what He wants, we certainly know that from the commandments He has given us. Is someone seeking help? Help him. Has someone offended you? Forgive him. Have you offended somebody? Rush to ask forgiveness and make peace. Did somebody praise you? Don't be proud. Did somebody scold you? Do not be angry. Is it time to pray? Pray. Is it time to work? Work. Etc., etc., etc. If, after all of this has been explained, you set about to act in this way in every instance, so that your works will be pleasing to God, having carried them out according to the commandments without any deviation, then all the problems of your life will be solved completely and satisfactorily. The purpose is the blessed life beyond the grave; the means are the works according to the commandments, the execution of which is required by each instance of life. It seems to me that all of this is clear and simple; there is no reason to torture yourself with difficult problems. You need to put out of your mind any plans about "multi-beneficial, all-embracing, common-to-all mankind" activity such as the progressives rant about. Then your life will be regarded as enclosed within peaceful boundaries, and leading toward the final goal without hindrance. Remember, the Lord does not forget even a glass of cold water given to someone tormented by thirst.

You will say, "All the same, it is still necessary to select and determine one's way of life!" Indeed, how would we go about determining it? We would start by thinking it over, and end up with mass confusion in our heads. Best and most hopeful of all is to accept with obedience, gratitude and love that determination which God utters in the course of our life's circumstances. I am taking your situation! You are presently under your parents' protection. What is the best thing to desire? Warmth, safety, freedom. Live, not flying a long way off in thought, but diligently doing each thing which falls to you. "But still, think about how it is impossible to always remain that way. I must, at some point, begin my own life. How should I be then? And how can I not think about it?" There, that is the best line of thought for you in this matter! Put yourself in God's hands and pray that He put you in the place that He considers best, so that your fate does not hinder you, but instead helps you to attain that blessed life beyond the grave, without dreaming about some splendid lot. After you have made up your mind in this way, wait patiently for the time when God will speak to you. He will speak through the concurrence of circumstances and the will of your parents. After you have become strengthened in these thoughts and have found peace in God, live without making empty plans, but doing the works that fall on you with respect to your parents, brothers, sisters, other relatives and to all people. Do not think at all that this life is empty. Everything that you do here, no matter what it is, will be a work, and if you do it with the consciousness that such a work is according to the commandments and that God wants such a thing, then the work will be pleasing to God. So it is with every small thing.

It seems I have explained everything to you. I would only add the hope that you have tried to grasp well what was written, have reinforced it, and thus made up your mind. I predict to you that you will find complete peace, and that you will no longer be troubled by such thoughts as "My life is not going anywhere...I am not doing anything useful." There is just one other thing; it is necessary to keep the heart in check, because it takes pride in such nonsense. True, it is no good without the heart, for what kind of life is it without the heart? All the same, it is not good to give it free reign. It is blind, and without strict guidance one immediately falls into a ditch!

May the Lord bless you!

17.

A GOD-PLEASING LIFE

Contributions to the heavenly treasury. A God-pleasing life. Dreams of the progressives about the universal goodness of man and their falsehood.

I am very glad that you took to heart what was written in the last letter, and that you agree to behave in just such a manner. May the Lord help you!

God gave us this life so that we would have time to prepare for the next one. This one is short, but the next one has no end. Although this life is short, during its course one may lay in provisions for all of eternity. Each good work goes toward this end like a small contribution; from all such contributions comes the overall capital, the interest of which will determine the upkeep of the saver for all of eternity. He who makes larger contributions will have a richer upkeep, while he who makes smaller contributions will have a lesser upkeep. The Lord will render to each one according to his works.

We must presently devote all our concern to making a few more contributions to that account. This concern is neither complicated nor difficult, as the Lord Himself confirms when He says *For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light* (Matthew 11:30). I have explained this to you with respect to the thoughts that have troubled you in order to assuage your sorrow, as if you lived without being useful and were to spend your entire life without being useful, if you were to continue living as you are living now. For the entire order of Christian life is thus: Believe in God, in the worshipful Trinity that saves us in the Lord Jesus Christ through the benevolence of the Holy Spirit and, receiving the beneficial powers through the Divine mysteries of the Holy Church, live according to the commandments of the Gospel, being inspired with the hope that God, for the smallest feasible labor of ours, for the sake of faith in the Lord Savior and obedience to Him, will not deprive us of heavenly blessings. This I am adding intentionally, so that you see in what spirit we must perform a real Christian's works. **For some people say that good works are necessary, while others say that faith is necessary. But both are needed; faith must be combined with works, and works with faith.**

All the same, attention must be concentrated principally on carrying out the commandments. We already believe, what else is needed? Carry out the commandments, for *faith without works is dead.*[1] Also, thankfulness to the Lord: that it suited Him to determine the value of our works, not by their magnitude or greatness, but by our inward disposition when carrying them out, having at the same time given us a multiplicity of opportunities for performing good works according to His will, so that, if we pay attention to ourselves, we may at every moment perform God-pleasing works. There is no need to go abroad for this, as the progressives do. Instead, just look around yourself each day and each hour; on whatever you see the seal of the commandment, carry it out immediately, in the belief that God Himself this very hour requires this work of you, and nothing else.

---

[1] *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?* (James 2:20)

Work at becoming even more strongly fixed in such thought. As soon as you have done so, peace will begin pouring into your heart from the belief that each moment you are working for the Lord. This beginning embraces everything. Even when you are told to darn your youngest brother's sock, and you do it for the sake of the Lord's commandment to listen and help, this will be numbered among the God-pleasing works. **Thus each step, each word, even each movement and glance, everything may direct one to walk in God's will and, consequently, to move each moment toward the ultimate goal.**

The progressives have in mind all mankind or at least all of its people lumped together. The fact is, however, that "mankind," or "the people" does not exist as a person for whom you could do something right now. It consists of individual persons: By doing something for one person, we are doing it within the general mass of humanity. If each one of us did what was possible to do for whoever was standing right in front of our eyes, instead of goggling at the community of mankind, then all people, in aggregate, would at each moment be doing that which is needed by those in need, and, by satisfying their needs, would establish the welfare of all mankind, which is made up of haves and have-nots, the weak and the strong. But those who keep thoughts of the welfare of all mankind inattentively let slip by that which is in front of their eyes. Because they do not have the opportunity to perform a general work, and let slip by the opportunity to perform a particular work, they accomplish nothing towards the main purpose of life.

I was told of such an instance in St. Petersburg. There was some sort of meeting of young people who were advocates of universal welfare—this was at the very height of progressive raving. One gentleman was making an impassioned speech about love for mankind and the people. Everyone was enraptured. But when he returned home, his servant did not open the door quickly enough—he had not seen him coming. The servant did not give him a candle quickly enough, something had happened to his pipe, and it was a little cold in his room. Our philanthropist could not stand this, and finally, he sharply reprimanded his servant. The latter answered something back, and the former struck him in the chest. And so here is our fine fellow, who was overflowing with love toward mankind in one place, who could not behave properly toward even one person at home. Also at the very height of progressivist raving, there were pretty girls who threw themselves into the work of bookbinding establishments, who often left their mothers without a crust of bread. All the same, they imagined that they were in some way moving forward and establishing the happiness of mankind. **All troubles come from a mental outlook that is too broad. It is better to humbly cast your eyes down toward your feet, and to figure out which step to take where.** This is the **truest path.**

This is the second time I have told you about all this, in order that all of it become more firmly entrenched in your mind. I am guarding you from the obfuscation that progressivist dreams direct at the soul.

18.

THE ONE THING NEEDFUL

The significance of spiritual needs in the order of the other aspects of human life. The one thing needful. The supremacy of the spirit as the natural harmony of all needs which are able to give peace and rest. The absence of this peace in mankind. Universal vanity and the downfall of the spirit. The seed of this confusion is received together with one's birth.

Now there is nothing to prevent us from turning our minds to a solution of the remaining problem. To reacquaint ourselves with the subject, however, let us briefly recall what has been said already.

We agreed that man has three (or five, including the intermediate) levels of life, the spiritual, intellectual and corporeal; that each one of them has its aggregate of needs, those natural and peculiar to man; that these needs are not all of equal worth, but instead, some are higher, and others lower; and that **the balanced satisfaction of them gives man peace.** Spiritual needs are above all, and when they are satisfied, then even though the others are not satisfied, peace exists; but when the spiritual needs are not satisfied, then, even though all other needs are richly satisfied, there is no peace. That is why **the satisfaction of them is called** ***the one thing needful.***

When the spiritual needs are met, they teach a person to harmonize with those needs the satisfaction of the other needs, so that neither the needs of the intellect nor the needs of the body interfere with the spiritual life, but, instead, aid it. Then within a person is established complete harmony of all motions and revelations of his life. There is a harmony of thoughts, feelings, desires, undertakings, relationships, pleasures. And this is Paradise! Contrary to this, when the spirit is not satisfied, and this one thing needful is forgotten, then each of these other needs runs off in a different direction, each one demands fulfillment of its own needs, and their muddle and cry, like noise at a bazaar, deafen the poor person, and he runs around like a madman trying to satisfy them. But he never has peace, because when one need is being satisfied, the others are not, and, not considering themselves to be inferior to that need which is being honored with fulfillment, persistently demand their own satisfaction, just as children make demands of their mother when she is feeding one child, and the other five are crying. That is why there is noise, racket, agitation on all sides and disorder in everything inside such a person. This is just how the turbulent zone that we have been discussing in general comes into being, and it even further disturbs and disorders everything that is within. Such a person is never satisfied with anything, always has difficulties, stands about wearily, and having looked about himself is bewildered where to begin, and so he goes dizzily round and round. This is the vanity and downfall of the soul!

This is also the starting point of the question, just how is one to be? What must be done, in order that the spiritual aspect be made supreme in us, and, by ruling everything, put our lives in order?

I will tell you right now that this question would be pointless if the life peculiar to us developed as it is supposed to. For both the bodily and intellectual needs are natural to us, just as are the spiritual needs; and the satisfaction of them cannot in and of itself create disorder and confusion in our lives anymore than does the satisfaction of the spiritual needs. Develop them all in harmony and in natural mutual subordination, and then human life would flow like a charm! Plant a seed, water it, keep it in the warmth it needs, and it will put out a sprout, and then a stem, and a leaf, and finally a beautiful flower. That is how it would be with a person. Let him open himself in the natural order, and you would always have an excellent person as the result. But why is it, then, that we do not see this excellence in ourselves or others? How do our lives get distorted?

Recall how you felt after you were immersed for a little while in that whirlpool or turbulent life. Indeed, you experienced a lot of inner confusion. If this were to be repeated a few times, if you did not take some precautions, you would be caught up in that very same whirlpool—and you would have that life which is vain, and the downfall of the spirit. Thus, could we not explain our disorder by saying that it is caused by disorderly people, that we are attracted to them, and we take on their disorderliness. You have just now come under the influence of this disorderliness, because your upbringing was under the regulating influence of your devout family and relatives. Others, however, whose families and relatives live in turbulence and confusion, take on this confusion from childhood and grow up in it. Perhaps this is the reason why our lives are diverted from their natural course, and unnatural confusion enters within them.

No, this does not explain the matter, for then the question still remains: How did confusion enter into this group of people? Why does it exist in families and society? What is outside of a man is a manifestation of that which is within him. Disorder enters into the family and society from man. There is nothing within him which will not be manifested eventually outside of him. Then the outer gives back to the inner that which it has received from the inner. Once again the question arises: How did this confusion enter into man? Again, I would say the outer turbulence influences the inside, and reproduces itself there, because the seed of it and predisposition to it is already within.

You were confused and could not find peace. Why? You were silent about it, but I did not tell you, because it was not the right time. Now I will tell you. During those two days, when you were immersed in the turbulent life, you were carried away, your heart sympathized, if not with everything, then with many things. It was from these sympathies that turbulence and confusion arose within you. When you came to yourself, you saw something new within yourself. Your conscience reported to you that this new thing was your doing, and that it was improper, and it began to punish you. Heeding this voice, you then considered everything carefully and correctly appraised that way of life. After this, if you should happen to fall again into this confusion, and if, as I have told you more than once, you keep your heart detached, not letting it have its will, then it will begin to break with its sympathies, and you will not experience the anguish which you experienced. I am reminding you of this, however, in passing. Because what I am talking about is how you, who have lived in a different order up to this point, could have sympathy for disorder. Think about it, and you will find that the sympathy exists, and had existed previously within, but it was hidden, and now has come outside. Outside influences do not create anything new, but merely act on what is already within. I will tell you an example. I have seen lepers. Their children are born healthy and normal-looking, and they grow up healthy. But the time comes when the leprosy manifests itself in them, and they begin to be like their parents and all other lepers. Where did the leprosy come from? From within! And how did it get there? It was there at birth.

From this it will be simple for you to make the conclusion that, if we see within ourselves disorderliness and confusion—thoughts, feelings, desires, undertakings, acts—and if we swirl around in them, it is because the seed of all of this has entered our nature, and this seed of disorderliness, being unleashed along with the unleashing of our forces and needs, introduces confusion within us and causes our lives in this way to be confused and turbulent.

Think over now, if you will, where this seed comes from. I say, "Think this over, if you will," because we can in no other way find a satisfactory answer to the question which has already been repeated several times: How is one to be? Whoever wishes to successfully treat a disease must find its cause. Without that, the cure cannot have a correct course and success.

That is what must be discussed at this point.

19.

ANCESTRAL SIN

Ancestral sin as the source of inner confusion and disorder. The possibility of treatment of the condition of a man harmed by sin.

Although I wrote you to think over the problem of where the seed of inner confusion and disorderliness comes from, and I myself promised to discuss it, indeed it is already known, and you know where it comes from. There is no reason to think it over, but merely to recall what we believe about this. We believe that such seed was not introduced into our nature by the Creator during man's creation. Instead, it was introduced after the creation, by the power of the fall of our ancestors who, having transgressed the commandment, damaged and disordered our nature, which was transferred as damaged and disordered to their descendants, that is, to all mankind. Thus it has come down even to us and to you, and serves as the reason for the confusion and disorderliness within us, from which comes all disorder outside, and in the personal life of each person, as well as in family life and life in society.

Why this disorderliness? Although the seed of it is received by us at birth, it is not natural to us. It does not belong to human nature in such a way that without it a human being is not a human being; on the contrary, without it, a human being becomes a true human being. It is our disease; and only by eliminating it are we able to be healthy in the way in which we are supposed to be by nature, as it was given to us from the hand of the Creator. I recall your desire "to come to the level of human dignity." Treat the aforementioned disease within yourself, and you will come to it.

Recall that our inner confusion and disorderliness are innate, but that they are not natural; they are not an essential part of our nature. Instead, they are crowded among our natural parts, disordering each one in its own activity, and in its mutual relationships with other parts. If this were natural, then their presence would not cause the suffering and tortures which we experience from them. That which is natural is what constitutes joy in life, but that which is unnatural oppresses it and tortures it. On the other hand, if it were natural, then, if someone were to be free and pure from it, then he would not be a human being. But we know a Man, Who was completely pure from it, and Who was all the same a human being. We also know, that everyone who puts Him on receives the power to purify himself, even as He is pure (1 John 3:3), and to become like Him.

Recall, I say, that this disorderliness is innate within us, but that it is not natural; recall, and maintain a firm conviction about it. This conviction will support within you a strong desire for curing this disease. If it is not natural, then this means that there is the possibility for it to be cured. By having such hope, who would not be inspired and cure himself as a result? Our nature in pure form is good. The angels themselves look on it with love and wonder, when it appears as such. Wouldn't we also like to see it as such—and inwardly too, besides—in others and in ourselves? Truly, all our happiness and well-being consists in our deliverance from this disease. For, when it no longer exists, what would prevent us from being in a blessed state, and to feel ourselves as such? Contrary to this, if this disease is natural, then it cannot be cured. Thus it would remain always, no matter how hard you worked to rid yourself of it. If you accept this thought, you will lose heart, and say to yourself: this is how it is. For this is that woeful despair, which, once it has been introduced into people, they have given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness (Ephesians 4:19).

I shall repeat again: Maintain the conviction that our disorderliness is not natural to us, and do not listen to those who say, "It is no use talking about it, because that is just how we are made, and you cannot do anything about it." That is not how we are made, and if we undertake to cure ourselves, then we will be able to do something about it.

I am telling you all this to inspire you to undertake this and so that you will not subject yourself again to such torments as you experienced, but instead cut off the very possibility of such. It should be considered how this may be achieved.

20.

THE DISTURBANCE IN THE NATURE OF MAN

Continuation. Clarification of the disturbance which occurred in the nature of man by the sin of the forefather. Communion with God functions as the source of the dominion of the spirit over the soul and body. Through the violation of the commandments man separated himself from God and lost dominion over the soul and

body and became subjected to the dominion of the passions.
The depiction of man laid waste by a passionate fall.

I shall continue. What exactly happened to us as a result of the transgression of our forebears? Our nature remained the same, the parts and forces of our substance remained the same, with the same laws and needs. *Our consciousness, however, did not freely set out in the same direction.* **The passions disturbed the mutual correlation of our parts and forces, and, by violating their original order, introduced disorder into the overall activity and life of man, engendering from themselves a special class of destructive forces. These passions are not natural to us,** but have such power as to control all of our forces as it suits them. That is what happened.

God created man to be happy namely in Him, through living interaction with Him. For this, He breathed into his face the breath of His life, that is, the spirit, as has been mentioned already. **The essential attributes of the spirit are consciousness and freedom,** while the essential movements of it are confession of God the Creator, Providence and Requiter; with a feeling of complete dependence upon Him; a feeling that everything is expressed with a loving view towards God, in unceasing attention to Him and reverential fear before Him; with the desire to create always that which is pleasing before Him in accordance with the statutes of the conscience; and with renunciation of everything, in order to taste the One God and to live and rejoice with Him alone. **Man has been given consciousness and freedom in the spirit,** not so that he may become conceited and do as he pleases, but **so that, having acknowledged that everything he has is from God, he may live in God, and freely and consciously head toward that one goal.** When he is so disposed, then he abides in God, and God abides in him. **When God abides in a man, He gives his spirit the power to control the**

soul and body, and also everything that is outside of him. This was the original condition of man. God appeared to our forebears and confirmed all of this by His Divine word, after ordering them to know Him alone, to serve Him alone, to walk in His will alone. So that they would not get confused when considering how to carry out all of this, He gave them a small commandment: Do not taste of the fruit of one of the trees, which He called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That is how our forebears began to live and to rejoice in Paradise.

A spirit, which fell primarily because of pride, envied them and knocked them from the path after inciting them to break the small commandment that was given them. He flatteringly suggested that by tasting the forbidden fruit, they would taste something so good that they just could not imagine; they would become like gods. They believed, and...they tasted. The matter of tasting, perhaps, is not significant; what is harmful is that they believed, without knowing who it was they believed. Perhaps even that would not have been so bad, if the evil spirit had not poured such horribly offensive thoughts and feelings toward God into them, like poison. He convinced them that God forbade them to eat from the tree because by doing so, they too, would become gods. That is what they believed. Having believed this, they could not help but have blasphemous thoughts about God, such as the idea that He envied them and treated them without benevolence. Having accepted such thoughts, they could not avoid certain bad feelings toward Him or self-willed decrees: "We ourselves will take what Thou dost not want to allow us to have. This is what He is like, and we thought that He was so good! Well, we will just have to fix things up for ourselves in defiance of Him!" This was what was lodged into their hearts about God. Such thoughts and feelings were horribly blasphemous! It is these thoughts and feelings which signify the falling away from God and the inimical rebellion against

Him. Something else also happened within them, which is ascribed to the evil spirit: "I shall set my throne above the clouds and I shall be equal to the Most High." This was not just an idle thought, but a hostile decree.

Thus, by taking upon itself the arranging of its own lot, man's consciousness became conceited, and freedom became self-willing. The complete falling away from God was accomplished with a certain aversion and hostile revolt against Him. It is for this reason that God abandoned such transgressors, and the living union was disrupted. God is everywhere and maintains everything, but He enters into free creatures only when they surrender themselves to Him. When they are self-absorbed, He does not violate their self-rule; He continues to keep and maintain them, but does not enter inside them. Thus our forebears were also left alone. If they had repented sooner, perhaps God would have returned to them, but they were stubborn, and even with obvious evidence, neither Adam nor Eve would acknowledge that they were guilty. Judgment followed, and with it the punishment of expulsion from Paradise. Then they came to their senses, but it was too late. They had to bear the punishment laid upon them, as did our entire race after them. Thanks be to the all-merciful God, that although He turned from us, He did not discard us, and arranged a marvelous way for reunion with Him.

I have digressed a little far here. We must fix our attention on what happened within man. Indeed! The spirit had authority over the soul and body, because it was in living communion with God, and from Him it received divine power. When the living communion with God was disrupted, the flow of Divine power was also disrupted. The spirit, left by itself, was not able to rule the soul and body, but was drawn to and itself captured by them. The intellect ruled over man, and through the intellect, corporeality, and man became intellectual and car-

nal. Although the spirit was the same, it was without authority. It announces its existence at times through the fear of God, at other times through the alarms of the conscience, at other times still through the dissatisfaction with anything created. These manifestations are not paid any heed, but are merely taken into consideration, all care being turned to the arranging of one's life here, to which the intellect is assigned, a life more material, because life here is conducted with a body, and everything that is corporeally tangible seems necessary.

When this subversion of order in the interrelationships of the parts of our nature took place, **man could no longer see things in their true perspective, and he could not keep his needs, desires and feelings in their proper place. These needs, desires and feelings were thrown into confusion, and disorder became their characteristic feature.** But this condition, which is of course evil, would have been even tolerable, if the passions had not otherwise entered and tyrannized man. Have you seen how wrath racks an angry man like a fever? How envy permeates someone who is envious until the poor man is green? How a mournful man is so consumed by grief that he is reduced to skin and bones? All the **passions** are like this. They **entered inside us along with selfishness.** As soon as our forebear inwardly uttered "I myself," selfishness took root inside him, this poison and this satanic seed. **From this then developed the horde of passions;** pride, envy, hatred, grief, despondency, greed and sensuality, with all of their numerous and multi-faceted consequences. Having become inbred, they agitate to an even greater degree a condition that was already perturbed without them.

That is what the illness consists of: The spirit became conceited and self-willed. Because of this it lost its authority, and fell under the rule of the soul and body and everything outward. From this came the confusion of the intellectual-physical needs and desires, and especially the infinitude of such needs and desires. This infinitude is imparted to them by the spirit from itself. In and of themselves, these needs are finite and not turbulent. The fact that they seethe without limit is because the spirit rages in them, and the spirit by nature has boundless energy. From this comes gluttony, drunkenness, avarice and many other things to which man does not think to set a limit. But the main illness is the passions, the alien tyrants.

Now you must make a simple induction: **What is necessary for restoring everything in us back to its original order?** I will write you about this next time, and you think it over in the meantime.

21.

THE NECESSITY OF UNION WITH GOD

The necessity of union with God for salvation. Man himself is not capable of doing this. The Spirit of God accomplishes this in us on account of the Redemption offered by the Son of God.

What is your reply to the question of what is necessary for restoring everything in us to what it was previously, to the original order? No matter what you came up with, I will continue with my own thoughts.

Since we went down the hill, we must turn around and go back up it again. How did the illness, acting in opposition to us, enter, and how may it be expelled? We have fallen away from God; what is required to be reunited with Him? We have fallen away, doubting God's word; we must reestablish complete faith in this word. Having lost trust of and faith in God, we made the fatal decision: "I myself"—it is necessary to destroy that "I myself." Once this occurred, our spirit lost its proper authority to rule over the soul and body, and conversely

fell under the yoke of slavery to them; authority must be restored to the spirit. When the authority of the spirit was disrupted, the needs of the soul and body dispersed in different directions, and within our desires there came about confusion; all of these needs must be once again brought into unity, and in them must be established an order of mutual subordination. Along with the fatal "I myself," a pack of fears, like wild beasts which prey on us, has encroached on the circle of our lives; these fears must be driven out.

See how much there is to be done. Already by the great number and the importance of these necessary items you may conclude that we ourselves cannot manage what is above all a matter concerning us. It is especially impossible for us to hope to rectify this matter of utmost importance to us on our own, because we have not established the primary point, without which there is no starting anything else, namely, reunion with God, which can in no way be in our power. We may wish for it and seek it, but to arrange it—this is a matter which is out of our hands. Who can encroach on God's realm, or who can himself lay the path to Him? Who is strong enough to take from God what he desires, the more so to compel God to be in us, so that we may also be in Him, and especially since all this has already been given us, but received with contempt, and the face of God met in a belittling manner with disbelief and His authority defied by self-will? You say, I will repent and I do repent. It is not up to you, however, to provide the conditions. Perhaps repentance does indeed have its place in the matter, but only when God Himself decrees it and agrees to accept it. In and of itself, what use is it?! You end up hurting yourself badly, what good is that ?

Thus, **reunion with God is not in our power**, and the conditions and form of its accomplishment, and everything relating to it from this end, are out of our hands. At the same

time, it is indeed important to know that once you accomplish this reunion, everything else will start moving by itself. Instantly the spirit will gather strength, subordinate the soul and body to itself, put in order the needs and desires and expel the passions. How could this take place on its own? I am speaking like this because I want you to know that there is nothing for us to bang our heads over as to how we are to reunite with God. There is nothing to beat your head against, nothing for you to devise. Rather, since it has pleased God to establish a law and order for this reunion, rush to accept it with complete faith and make use of it with warm gratitude. Thanks be to God the lover of mankind! Everything for reunion has already been accomplished, established and explained. Accept it and use it.

I will not go into great detail as to how all of this has been accomplished; I will tell you what is most important. **For the restoration of our spirit and its reunion with God, it is necessary that the Divine Spirit descend to it and revive it. In order to open the way to the descent of the Divine Spirit, the Only-Begotten Son of God came to earth, was incarnated, suffered, died on the cross, was resurrected, and ascended into heaven.** It is in this respect that the Son of God Himself turned His work over to the Holy Spirit when, after telling His disciples about His going to the Father and having filled them with sorrow, He said to them to comfort them: *I tell you the truth: it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you* (John 16:7). Even before this the holy Evangelist John the Theologian, in explaining the Lord's words *He that believeth on me...out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water*, added *But this spoke He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified* (John 7:38,39). It was appropriate to give praise to the Son of God, who humbled Himself in the Incarnation and suffered, in order that the Holy

Spirit would come and dwell with those who believed in Him. He came and began to abide, and His abiding in believers was so imperative, that the other Apostle inquired of them with wonder: *Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?* (I Cor. 3:16)

There is everything in its entirety for you. The Son of God was incarnated, suffered in the flesh, died on the Cross, rose again, ascended into Heaven, and sent the Holy Spirit from the Father. The Holy Spirit, Who may be received by those who believe in the Son, abides with them and carries out in them that about which the Son prayed: *As Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us* (John 17:21).

Just how does He accomplish this? All those who believe in the Son of God are combined in spirit, which, being revived, is reunited with God. This is called the new birth from God, which makes believers the children of God through grace, as St. John the Evangelist says: *As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood...but of God* (John 1:12,13). And the law of spiritual life of Jesus Christ came into being: *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God; for only that which is born of the Spirit is spirit* (John 3:5,6).

Do not desire to question as to why all of this is needed for the restoration of the true life in us; accept it and maintain it with the simplicity and sincerity of childish belief. As soon as you begin to question, the enemy will come, and, as he did in times of old to Eve, he will whisper temptations to you and shake your faith, and through this deprive you of the very fruits of that faith. Just as it was unclear then how such consequences could result just from tasting fruit, although they did indeed result from this tasting, so now it is unclear as to why the Son of God should become incarnate and suffer, and then rise again, send the Spirit down to us for restoring us. Once again, however, our restoration depends on sincere faith in such an arrangement. All who have accepted and who accept this with faith are restored.

Thus, do not test the Divine arrangement, and I will not say anything about it to you, although something is usually said in explanation of it. I will say only a few words about what the Holy Spirit does in us, in the restoration of our spirit. However, be patient until the next letter.

22.

THE REDEMPTIVE UPLIFTING OF FALLEN MAN

Continuation of the redemptive uplifting of fallen man. The participation of the entire Holy Trinity in our salvation. The order in which good feelings are aroused in the saved man by the Spirit of God. The participation in this work of man himself. Zeal for salvation as the first condition to attain this.

I shall continue. The only begotten Son of God reconciled us with God by becoming incarnate for our sake, and satisfied Divine truth by His death on the cross. He ascended into Heaven and sat at the right hand of the Father, and constantly intercedes for us with His conciliatory intercession. Along with this, He represents for us the source of true human life. Whatever characteristic may be said to be human, He manifested also in His own humanity; and all believers, when they receive the new birth, receive the seed of the Christ-like life. Whoever is baptized in Christ puts on Christ. The grace of the Holy Spirit produces this within believers. Just what, namely, goes on within us under the action of this grace?

Before we get into this, I will ask you to always keep in mind the thought that, when it is said that the Son of God did and does one thing, while the Holy Spirit does something else, it should not be supposed that Their restorative action within us is divided between Them. This action comes undivided from God, all-venerated in the Trinity. Why does St. Peter, when expressing his greetings to the recipients of his letter, say: *According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you* (etc.) (I Peter 1:2). St. Paul concludes his second letter to the Corinthians with similar well-wishing: *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you* (II Cor. 13:14). **The restorative action in us of God, all-venerated in the Trinity, is His communion with our spirit. This communion is not from one person alone, but from God undivided in three persons.** Why is it said that it is the Son, the Holy Spirit and the Father Who enter into communion with us? The Lord Savior, although He sits at the right hand of the Father, promised us, *I am with you alway* (Matthew 28:20). This is not an outward manifestation, but an inward one, for He says: *If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him* (John 14:23). Here God the Father and God the Son establish Themselves within us and dwell through faith and love, which are expressed by fulfillment of the commandments. Last time I quoted the Scripture that says the Holy Spirit dwells in believers who fulfill the commandments of God: *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?* (I Cor. 3:16) How great and inexpressible is the grace of God toward us! The triune God lives in us, if we are faithful to the conditions under which this takes place!

The production of Divine communion is brought about by the grace of the Holy Spirit. He prepares within us a dwelling, and together with God the Father and God the Son is established within us. Just how is this dwelling prepared?

The Divine Spirit acts secretly upon our spirit and sets it in motion. Our spirit, set in motion, recollects within itself its natural Divine knowledge that God exists, maintains everything, and is the Rewarder. **The consciousness of this gives rise to a feeling of complete dependence on God, and enkindles the fear of God.** These and other things are stirred up by the conscience, that witness and judge of our affairs and feelings, among which is rarely to be found anything which God would look upon with kindness. The conscience, alarmed by both the fear of God and the feeling of complete dependence upon God, furnishes the person with a feeling of the hopelessness of his situation: "Where shall I go? Where shall I run to?" But there is no where to run to; he has been caught and is in the hands of God—the Judge and Requiter. He feels *the wrath of God from Heaven against all unrighteousness* (Romans 1:18). Then comes the good news of the Gospel and a way out of misfortune. Without the Gospel, the awakening of our spirit would be ruinous, or would unavoidably plunge us into despair. But the goodness of God makes it so that the true awakening of the spirit is brought about and accompanied by the Gospel. To the person who inwardly asks as a result of the awakening of the spirit, "Where shall I go? Where shall I run to?" the Gospel proclaims, "Why run anywhere? Come beneath the protection of the Cross and be saved. The Son of God, Who was incarnate, died on the Cross to cleanse our sins. Believe this, and you will receive remission of sins and encounter the grace of God." The Apostles, in preaching the Gospel, always did this very thing. They would arouse anxiety, then they would say, "Believe in the crucified Lord, and you will be saved." That is what St. Peter did in his first sermon, on the day of the descent of the Holy Spirit. He alarmed and frightened the Jews until they began to cry out: “What shall we do then? Where can we go?” At that point he proclaimed to them: *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins* (Acts 2:38). St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, also contrived so that at the beginning he would frighten everyone, saying, *The wrath of God is revealed* (Romans 1:18), and only then did he indicate to everyone the refuge through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (3:22, etc).

When someone is in deep trouble and comes across an opportunity for escape and refuge, does he not seize upon it with great zeal? So it is with **our spirit, which, once it has heeded the good news of salvation in the Lord, undertakes with all its strength to do everything with good cheer and willingness, if only it may become a partaker of Gospel blessings. Such a disposition of our soul makes it ready for Divine communion, and the grace of the Holy Spirit, which has acted hitherto from the outside by arousing us, establishes itself within, not directly, but through the means of a sacrament.** The believer repents, is baptized and receives the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). This is the very action of Divine communion—living and active. With what feeling did this action manifest itself during the first sermon of the Holy Apostles! That is how it manifested itself after them, and how it manifests itself to this day, when everything connected with it is carried out in a worthy manner on our part.

However, not everything is accomplished by the Divine Spirit alone. We are expected to do something, and this “something” is of no small importance. **The Divine Spirit arouses, the good news indicates where to begin. This is from God. But, having done this, God stops, and awaits our consent.** With His first actions, God seems to be asking: “Do you want to get out of trouble? Here, do this.” This moment is the most important. Whoever yields himself to this opens the door to further actions of grace, which bring him then into the realm of the saved. If, however, a person does not yield himself, he cuts off further actions of grace, and he remains among those who perish. St. Paul preached in Areopagus. After the sermon, St. Dionysius and some of the people followed after him, and were baptized. Of the others, one said, "What is this idle talk supposed to be teaching us?" Someone else said, "Come some other time, we will listen to you then."[1] God does not desire the death of a sinner, but He does present a choice, and only he who chooses salvation is saved. If our consent were not required, God could save everyone in a single instant, for He wants everyone to be saved. In that case, no one at all would perish. But our free will does not always act wisely; it becomes stubborn and does not obey even God. That is how we perish.

Take note of this next point, if you will. It must always be present in each spirit, when one is on the side of those being saved. It consists of the following actions: Once grace has aroused the feeling of the urgency of the situation, and the good news has indicated the way out of it, to the feeling of hopelessness must be added the consciousness that the person himself is guilty of everything and repents of it; he must believe in the efficacy of the form of salvation offered to him, desire to be saved by this very form of salvation, and acquire good cheer in it. He must express complete willingness to do with complete sincerity everything that will be indicated to him, as a condition of salvation. When all of this has taken place in our spirit, there remains only to take part in the mysteries, and Divine communion is accomplished.

To summarize: Repent, desire salvation in the Lord, and acquire good cheer in it. These actions are calming; they occur inwardly and give contentment through their local manifestation. The final action—the willingness to do everything which

---

[1] See Acts 17:16-34.

is required—is the real active force in salvation,[1] insofar as it depends upon us; it is the source of saving activity and the life that is saved. This willingness, while it is expressed by us alone, is weak; but when Divine grace establishes itself within us, then it becomes all- powerful, knows no impediment, and overcomes everything. It is the unquenchable zeal for pleasing God and complete sincerity in fulfillment of the Divine will, in the presence of complete faith in the Lord and trust in salvation in Him Alone. It fulfills the Divine eternal purpose; *we should be holy and without blame before Him in love* (Ephesians 1:4), for which the Lord makes us *zealous of good works* (Titus 2:14).

I have intentionally directed your attention to this zeal, so that you become zealous. For once it is a part of us, then Divine grace for its part will not omit doing everything with abundance. Thus, when there exists such zeal in the realm of faith and the search for salvation, then everything exists, and the accomplishing of our salvation is undoubtedly in motion and heading towards its goal. **When there is no zeal, then there is nothing at all; he who is not zealous for salvation is a non-participant in salvation.**

What a long, roundabout way I have taken to bring you to this point. All of this was a general discourse, however. Now we will begin to discuss you.

23.

TRUE SPIRITUAL ZEAL

Signs of true spiritual zeal as distinguished from emotional zeal.

Last time I set out to summarize and did not get to the main point. The point is, as you know, **the zeal that we were** discussing, that active, live, fervent, untiring zeal that is the sign our spirit has been rehabilitated and restored to its former power through reunion with God by means of the grace and action of the Holy Spirit. We do have our outbursts of zeal, but they are only outbursts, and then they are extinguished. The zeal which is always fervent, constant and untiring zeal, exists only when our spirit is filled with grace by the Holy Spirit. Thus, when you have such zeal, it means also that your spirit has been restored, and—do not quench it—it takes in hand both the mind and body, all the requirements of their nature, all their domestic and civil cares, and it directs them toward one thing: pleasing God and salvation. Do you have such zeal, or not?

---

[1] Fr. Seraphim's note: "This is *will*—weakest thing today."

I suppose it is very difficult for you to answer this, and not just on account of modesty. I shall come to your aid. Do not confuse this zeal with other kinds of zeal. Spiritual zeal is completely given over to pleasing God and the salvation of the soul. It is full of the fear of God, and it continually keeps its attention on Him, taking care in every way not to allow anything in the thoughts, feelings, words, or deeds that is not pleasing to God, as directed by the conscience that it keeps as pure as a mirror. It guards its heart from any attachment to anything, except for God and Divine things, and by its hopes it moves into another world, having cut off all earthly cares. It does not shun that which is needed for temporal life, but everything relating to the here and now is for it an attachment, and there is really only one important thing, pleasing God and salvation. Do you see this? Consider this well, if you will, and measure yourself against it.

Also keep in mind that there is intellectual zeal. This is very powerful, but it is completely given over to the affairs of temporal life. There are those who are so zealous for science that they do not sleep; those who run around the entire world for art; those who do not spare any energy in their zeal for industry and trade; others who are zealous in domestic or civic affairs. All this would be neither here nor there; but the trouble is, when one of these kinds of zeal captures the attention and energy of **a person to a great extent, then it extinguishes spiritual zeal. The zeal of the soul in its best manifestations, such as given above, is cold toward the spiritual and repels any wish to occupy itself with that which satisfies spiritual zeal.** There is nothing to be said about other kinds of zeal, as they are contrary to spiritual. For there is also the zeal of vanity (for one's dress and the like) and the zeal of evil—impure and sinful, directed toward the satisfaction of the passions. These latter sorts do not just cool spiritual zeal, but are completely adverse to it, and they both suppress it within themselves, if it should somehow begin to stir within the conscience, and also pursue and persecute it inside others. There are many different kinds of zeal! Look within yourself, don't you have one of these kinds of zeal, too?

Spiritual zeal does not drive out intellectual zeal for science, art, domestic or civil concerns. It merely moderates and regulates it, directing it toward spiritual views, not allowing it to become zealous about anything which is counter to itself. It banishes only the vain and the passionate, and does not allow them to appear in the sphere of life of the man, of whom it has taken possession. In only one instance does it not allow even intellectual zeal, namely, when it sees that the actions and pursuits for the satisfaction of such a zeal—science, art, craftsmanship, family life, civil service and occupation—do not give full range to it (spiritual zeal), but crowd it out, cool it and extinguish it. Then it completely removes the person, whom it possesses, from all those parts of life which are ruled by intellectual zeal, and carries him off to a place where he may occupy himself with only that which satisfies it—spiritual zeal. Have you guessed what I am talking about here?

I am isolating true spiritual zeal from all that is alien to it for you, so that you may see for certain that it does exist, and become zealous for it. **It is that fire which the Lord came to bring to the earth, and which, because of our fallen nature on earth, consumes everything that is unnecessary, while everything necessary it smelts and purifies.** The Apostle had it in mind when he wrote to the Thessalonians, *Quench not the Spirit* (1 Thess. 5:19). For although this Spirit is the Spirit of grace, Its presence in us is attested by the fervor of spiritual zeal, and It will be extinguished when this zeal is quenched. He had this zeal in mind, when he taught the Romans, (Be) ***not slothful in business***; (be) ***fervent in spirit; serving the Lord*** (12:11).

This very zeal is perseverance and diligence. The fervor in **spirit is testimony to its presence and action; serving the Lord is the direction and spirit of this zeal.** In directing such zeal, the Apostle commands the Philippians: *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. And the God of peace shall be with you* (Phil. 4: 8,9). These are the things for which the revived spirit has zeal; it is combined with God, and it maintains this combination as a result of this zeal. It is for this that the God of peace abides with him—a blessing above which there is no other.

Defining also the necessary course of zeal, the Apostle writes the Romans, *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God* (12:1-2). The renewal of the mind is the renewal of our spirit by grace. Once it has revived, it renounces the affairs of this world, and is zealous only about God-pleasing, presenting itself to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to Him.

There you are, an explanation of what zeal is, what its power is, and what its paths are! Since the significance of this zeal is so great, then you yourself will agree that it is worth the labor of discovering, with you, whether we have it. Work on this a little.

The feast of the Nativity is approaching. I wish you a Merry Christmas, and send you my greetings and good wishes! Along with this, I wish you a Happy New Year. I may not be able to write you before this.

24.

RENEWAL AND SELF-CLEANSING

New Year's Greetings. The necessity of renewal and self-cleansing. This produces in us spiritual zeal.

I wished you a Happy New Year in passing, and then it occurred to me to give you a special wish for it. What, specifically? That you become new. New in what way? In the way that a new dress is new: Everything is in its place, there is not the slightest little spot or wrinkle; it billows with freshness. That is what I wish for your soul to be like. You, in body, like the dress that we are talking about, fresh from the needle, will be completely new. Our soul, however, even upon its arrival in the world, brings the old; if this oldness is not removed from it, then it will remain old, without having tasted the new. Vanity and passions—that is what is old in the soul. Drive these out, and you will become new.

I will tell you a legend, and it will become clear to you what this is all about. A certain man lived somewhere far away in the desert. His internal organs became diseased, either his lungs, his heart, or his liver, or maybe all of them at once. The pain made him feel as if he were going to die. He could not expect human help from anywhere, and so he turned to God with the most intense prayer. The Lord heard him. One night after falling asleep he saw a vision. Two angels came with knives, cut him open, took out the ailing parts, cleaned them, washed them and anointed them with something. Then they put everything back in its place, sprinkled something over him, and everything healed, as if he had not even been cut open. When he awakened, the elder got up entirely healthy, as if he had never been ill; he was new like a youth in the flower of his strength. Do you see what I wish for you? That everything be purified in your soul, that everything that is diseased and old be cast away, that everything conducive to health and renewal be put in its place and sprinkled with living water. And that it become new, fresh, full of bright and joyous life.

I told this story to someone who labors over himself. When he heard it, he responded with enthusiasm, "Oh, if only the angels would come and do for my soul what they did for the body of the elder!" In this response you can hear both a prayer and also a desire to shift that which is supposed to be done through one's own labors to someone else. For such a crafty thought is not alien to our heart; we know that we are to be nothing but good, but to have to labor to achieve this—we despair. The angels are not going to come to purify and heal our heart. There exist such things as instructions and advice from angels, but everything must be done by oneself. All means are provided; that is, tools and surgeon's instruments. Take them and cut yourself wherever necessary without feeling any pity for yourself. No one else can do this for you. God Himself does not enter the sanctuary of the soul forcefully; instead, He requests to enter gently.

I shall not ask whether you are arranging for your own purification, or whether you will turn this over to others. You still have not undertaken this in the proper manner. When you do begin, I predict that not once will it cross your mind to think, "If only the angels would come and purify everything!" Although the angels will not undertake this for you, they will be right there with you. The act of cleansing must be conducted by one's own self, without any self-pity. The motivator of this act within us is that efficacious, living zeal about which I wrote last time. It is both chopper and knife, which always works extremely well when it is sharpened by grace and guided by its suggestions. It is ruthless when it establishes itself in the heart; it cuts, ignoring the cries of its victim. It is for this reason that the work goes successfully, and soon achieves its purpose; for the cutting is not the only thing. Once everything has been cut off, then zeal is present, but does not function as a knife. It acts as a guard, and turns all its fierceness on the enemies of salvation, on those annoyances from which no one is free and the shamelessness from which no one is ever left in peace.

You see yourself that I began this discussion in order to stimulate your desire to determine more precisely whether you have this kind of zeal. Without it, your spiritual activity will get nowhere. Indeed, when it is not there, your spirit is asleep; and when it is asleep, there is no use in discussing the spiritual.

25.

THE HIDDEN ACTION OF GRACE

Thoughts on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. The hidden action of grace which we receive in the Mystery of Baptism.

I would like to share some thoughts concerning you which came to mind on the Feast of the Lord's Baptism.[1] I was about to pose a question just for you: What do you think of your baptism? Was it merely a ceremony, or did it confer something on you? Then I thought it would be much better if I answered this myself. Here is my reply.

---

[1] Theophany.

Baptism gives us what nothing else on earth can give us: *It unites and combines with our natural Divine grace.* Thus, a person comes away from the baptismal font like an article from some workshop. As an example, take a bell in which silver has been added to copper. A similar copper bell without silver may outwardly resemble the bell with silver, but their composition is different, their sound is different, and they are regarded differently with respect to quality and value. That is the difference between a person who has been baptized, and one who has not. The difference is that the grace of the Holy Spirit combines with the baptism, since the person receiving baptism is being baptized with water and, along with it, the Holy Spirit. By appearance, he is the same person as the unbaptized person, but in actual fact, in their composition, they are quite different.

Thus, during Holy Baptism, some new element, a supernatural one, is added to our composition, and it will remain inside us hidden and secretly acting. We receive baptism as children, and although we do not know what is happening within us, the grace nonetheless combines with us and then begins to act within us apart from our consciousness, according to the singular goodness of God, and for the sake of the faith of our godparents and parents. While we are growing up, we are not able to distinguish within ourselves what is from our nature and what is from the grace which has been present in us from our very baptism, not in idleness, but acting in its own particular manner. In the early days, however, when those who were brought to the faith and baptized were adults, the action of grace noted within them was immediately perceptible to them and apparent to others. Especially striking were the changes in moral character and life, when, for example, an angry person would become mild, a proud person humble, a stingy one generous, a profligate one celibate, and the like. Something similar undoubtedly happened with us at the baptismal font. However, having reached maturity, and seeing the good things within ourselves, we often get conceited about them, or we ascribe them to ourselves. Instead, all that is good within us should be attributed to the grace of God, which remakes everything that is natural within us, and gives much directly from itself.

Grace acts inside us secretly from childhood. It is renewed within us by the communion of the Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ. The environment in which we grow up, if it is believing and pious, gives full range to the action of grace inside us through Christian upbringing. We grow out of childhood and adolescence under conditions entirely unlike those under which the non-baptized leave them. I suppose that it is pleasant for you to grasp the idea and to believe that you are much favored. Do not deny this, but give thanks once again. Grace acts secretly, but often it bursts out in the open, in holy outbursts and deeds. If you would chafe yourself a little more often as you go along in your Christian life, you would experience the action of grace more often. There is fire inside wood, but it is hidden. Rub a piece of wood against another piece, and you get smoke; then fire appears. There is electricity in amber and sealing wax, but it is not visible. Rub a piece, and immediately you will notice the attraction of small particles and even some sparking. The telegraph is also silent, but as soon as the device begins to produce friction, electricity immediately awakens, and acts swiftly.

So you see, favored daughter of God, what it is all about! Chafe yourself as necessary, as you go about the Christian life, and the grace of God will manifest its living action inside you continually. There are light bulbs.[1] What are they made from? Certain machines generate a lot of electricity, which is maintained in this action of generating. I would like for you, too, to become a self-illuminating sun under the action of the grace that has been given and which is present within you. **Again we have come to the same point, that you do not have to pity yourself; you just have to cut here, chafe there. Otherwise nothing will come from us in the spiritual sense, even if we are very attractive in our outward appearance.**

26.

THE ACTIVITY OF GRACE

Continuation concerning the hidden action of the grace of Baptism in man. An explanation of the action of grace by comparison to the action of leaven in dough and fire in iron. Coming of age man must firmly establish in himself God's grace by his free will. The danger of remaining in the middle of the road. Full burning resolve to serve God.

I suppose that you remember and still keep in mind that a Christian is not an ordinary person, being formed instead from nature and grace. **I would like to clarify something for you at this point: Those who are saved, that is, those who will enter the eternal Kingdom of God, are only those in whom grace dwells; not secretly, but openly, permeating our entire essence and becoming even outwardly visible, absorbing, as it were, our entire nature.**

Heed the word of the Savior! He says that the Kingdom of God is like when a woman takes leaven and adds it to dough.

---

[1] "Electric suns" in Russian.

The dough, once it has received the leaven, does not rise all at once; it will do so in its own time. The leaven within it permeates the dough little by little, and the entire dough becomes leavened. Bread baked from this is light, aromatic, delicious. It is exactly the same thing with grace which has been added to our nature: it does not permeate everything all at once; instead, it does so little by little. Then, **once it has permeated everything, one's entire nature is filled with grace. Everything which the person then does takes on a special character.** Although by **appearance the actions are the very same as other similar actions, they have a special aroma, a special taste, and a special sound. God accepts only these actions as being especially pleasing to Him.**

I will make another comparison in my explanation of how grace, when it is given room to act, permeates our entire nature, and then becomes outwardly visible for all who are able to see. It is like fire when it permeates iron: it is not only inside the iron but on the outside as well, and its fiery force is observable to everyone. So it is with grace, when it has permeated our nature: it becomes visibly perceptible to all. All those entering into contact with such a grace-filled person feel an unusual force present within him, which manifests itself in different ways. When such a person begins to speak about something spiritual, everything emanates from him as brightly as the midday sun, and his words go directly to the soul, authoritatively forming corresponding feelings and dispositions within. Even if he does not speak, he exudes a warmth which touches everything, and a certain force goes out, which stimulates moral energy and engenders readiness for every kind of spiritual action and exploit.[1]

---

[1] The Russian word is *podvig*, which in the spiritual context is a deed or act undertaken as a spiritual obedience. The Greek word is *agon*, which originally referred to an athletic contest or to the arena where the contest was held, and which came to mean any struggle, trial or danger.

We receive the grace of God through Holy Baptism in our childhood. From that moment, it begins to act within us and carry out its action, in the hope that when we reach adulthood, we ourselves, through the decision of our own will, will undertake zealously to do everything for our salvation that is in our power to do. When a family is devout and raises its children in the Christian way of life, grace itself creates peace within them, and they grow up to be gentle, humble, obedient, kind, God-pleasing and filled with the fear of God. Examples of this are to be seen everywhere.

I would point to you as one of them, if I were not afraid that you would get a high opinion of yourself, although thus far there is not a lot to think of about yourself, because nothing is as of yet the result of anything you have done. Everything visible in you is good, but it is from someone else; it has been given to you and cultivated within you. You are now faced with the following task: You must love all of this good and put it in your heart and keep it, then you must increase it and multiply it. It is true that you have a good foundation and have been on the right path, but up to this point none of this has been as a result of your own will and free decision. And if you do not begin making your own efforts in this matter now, none of what you learned from your upbringing will be firm, and when you encounter unpleasant circumstances it will desert you, leaving behind only a pleasant—or even unpleasant—memory.

Do you recall what you experienced when you were plunged into the whirlpool of worldly life? Who tormented you then and distressed your heart? Everything good in you has been kindled by the grace of God, from a pious family upbringing. Why then did your experiences bother you? Because you allowed yourself to conceive a special sympathy for these chaotic ways. Although you did not tell me about this, it is self-evident from the sorrow which tormented you later. Without this sympathy, there would not have been torment. I wrote you that if necessity were to force you to be plunged into the same whirlpool again, not to attach your heart to anything that you see or hear there. If you do not become attached, you will not experience any torments. Well, I do not know whether you are there, and, if you are, whether you are doing as I have told you. See for yourself. For you are your own mistress; you are entering the age of independent action. I say to you confidentially that either you will turn out to be just as empty, vain and passionate a person as everyone else, or, you could turn out to be neither one thing nor the other. The first kind of person is the result when you wholeheartedly plunge into that sort of life-style. Then you forget all past good, holiness, spiritual things, and come to have an adversarial relationship toward them. Knowing you, I am sure that this will not happen to you. However, I cannot rule out the possibility of the second case, that **you could turn out to be neither one thing nor the other—neither spiritual nor worldly, neither a Christian nor a pagan. This could happen even though you keep the pious ways in which you grew up, if you do not also guard your heart from sympathy for worldly ways.** Remember, I have in mind "sympathy" and not "participation," which is sometimes necessary, as you say. This sympathy would not divorce you completely from your previous upbringing, but would cool you to it, and you would be dragged into pious ways by habit alone, and not by choice of heart. Essentially, you would be neither in the worldly realm, nor in the true spiritual one—you would be neither one thing nor the other.

What would be in store for you as the result? The same thing to which the Lord in the Revelation has already condemned one of the angels of the churches: *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth* (Rev. 3:15-16). **One must be fervent toward God**

and all that is Divine, but cold toward everything secular and worldly. If you are neither cold toward the secular, nor fervent toward the Divine, but are instead lukewarm and half-cold toward both one and the other, then you will be cast out by God. How should one be? **You should choose the holy, God-pleasing spiritual life with your heart,** right now, as you are entering the period of independent life. Everything I have been saying leads to this. Will you choose? Get rid of your troubles—do not be indifferent, being neither one thing nor the other. May the Lord bless you and bring you to reason!

27.

INNER CONCENTRATION

Continuation about zeal and resolve to live according to grace. Inner concentration. The illumination of the covering of the soul. The stages of this illumination.

I am very pleased by your desire to be reborn. You have been torn by the desire; **may the Lord bless you, bring your desire to decisiveness, and then put it into action. This process, at least superficially, is not so complex or lengthy, but in reality it is a life-long labor.** How one reaches the point of decisiveness will be discussed later. Right now I will speak a little on the purpose. A conscious, clear-cut purpose at the beginning of an undertaking keeps the energy of our forces at the proper level to see it through to its completion.

Last time, I wrote to you that it is necessary for us of our own will to give scope to the Divine grace received by us at Baptism, so that it, like leaven, will permeate our entire essence in all its parts. Then I added that it begins to act immediately from the time of Baptism, and if it does not meet with any interference, it produces everything possible within the soul by itself, in the hope that, once a person has reached maturity, his soul through its own free choice will choose those elements of a Christian, God-pleasing life that have already been instilled by grace. When someone who has reached maturity chooses grace through his own consciousness and free choice, then grace itself will instruct him how to come to terms with himself and re-do everything within himself, and it will not leave him until this work is carried to its conclusion, as long as the person does not begin to oppose it by his self-will. You are now standing at that moment of life when the choice of whether to choose the side of grace, or the side opposing it, will be put to your self-will and freedom of choice. Let us suppose that you have selected the first option, and that you have brought your life, through labor, to the blessed conclusion of a grace-filled life. What do you think your internal being would look like then? Like a radiant star, beaming bright rays everywhere. That is what!

Remember, you said you could not control your thoughts, and then you wrote how I was ruining you with what I was saying, that everything had been better for you previously, but once you began to scrutinize yourself under my direction, you saw only disorder; your thoughts, feelings and desires were all in disarray, and you had no strength to put them in any kind of order. Here is the solution to the problem of why it is that way: *You have no center.* And you have no center because you have still not decided through your own consciousness and free choice which way you will go. Up to this point, the grace of God has instilled in you a feasible order, and this order has been and still is within you. From this point, however, the grace of God will not act on its own, but will instead await your decision. If you, through your own choice and decision, do not choose grace, then it will abandon you completely, and leave you in the hands of your self-will. You will be shunted off to the opposite side, and maybe your heart will even choose it; but do not expect that your inner disorder will abate by taking this direction. No, an even greater confusion and disorder will be created. Inner regulation begins only when you choose the side of grace, and make the ways of life in the spirit of grace the inviolable rule of your life. From that moment, as the decision is forming inside you, a center will also form within you, a powerful center, which will begin more and more forcefully to draw you toward itself. In this center will be grace, which has taken hold of your consciousness and free will (or, your consciousness and free will, combined with grace). This is the same thing which was previously called the resurrection or restoration of the spirit. Then the grace of God will begin to draw toward this center all of the other forces of your nature, both intellectual and spiritual, and govern their entire action, retaining within them that which is good, and destroying that which is bad. This drawing of everything to one center and directing of all to one goal is the inner rebirth which you have so fervently desired. Once this rebirth has been accomplished, then everything both great and small will proceed from this one center, and within you will be established the most perfect harmony, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will overshadow the inner temple of your nature. May the God of peace be with you! What a delightful and most blessed condition. You were torn by desire for something which is entirely worthy of your desire.

Stop and think a minute about what we said concerning the subtle element that is present everywhere, permeating everything, and which is of the same substance as our souls. When our soul is outside of grace, its covering is either as *gloomy* as the darkest night, as when someone indulges his passions and serves them; or it is *grey* like an obscure fog, as when someone who is not too given over to the passions still lives in vanity. Under the action of grace, however, not only is the soul permeated by grace, but its covering gradually grows brighter, just as gloomy weather gradually clears up. When the soul is entirely permeated by grace, then its covering also becomes entirely bright. Just as everything within is drawn toward one thing in this case, so does the brightness of the covering arise from that very same center, following spiritual actions. This is radiance. A person who has received grace shines inwardly as a star, not just with a spiritual light, but also with a material one.

This inner brightness in such people often bursts out and becomes visible to others. When I was in St. Petersburg in the forties, I heard about this from certain people, and I wanted very much to see it with my own eyes. I happened to receive a monk in whom perceptible actions of grace had already begun to manifest themselves. We began speaking about spiritual things. The more he entered within himself and the more his thought deepened, the brighter his face became, until it became as white as snow, with his eyes gleaming. It is said that Father Seraphim of Sarov quite often displayed this light, especially when at prayer in full view of everyone. There are many stories of similar manifestations in the accounts of the Fathers. For example, it is written how one of them, when standing at prayer, would raise his hands toward the sky, and bands of light would begin flowing from his fingers, and these bands of light would scatter over a wide area. Concerning another one, it is said that his disciple came to him for something and knocked at his door. There was no answer, so he jumped up to peek in the aperture, and saw that the starets was standing completely engulfed in fire, like a pillar of light. There are many such accounts. I was still a little boy when I heard something similar about St. Tikhon. The Transfiguration of the Lord, when He appeared entirely illumined with light, is one of those instances.

Such radiance, during the transition to the other life, reveals itself naturally, for then the coarse body wanes, and does not prevent the radiance from being seen by everyone. I have already reminded you of how St. Anthony the Great, while sitting and talking with his disciples, turned his eyes to heaven, and after he had gazed for a little while, said "I saw a pillar of light rising from earth to heaven. This was the soul of Ammon soaring to the Lord." There are many such sightings which have been recorded. It goes without question that only those in whom there dwells the grace of God will enter Heaven, grace that has been received and which has begun its action to some degree, even if it has not had time to permeate one's entire being. Recall the parable of the ten virgins.[1] The five foolish ones did not enter the chamber because they had no fire in their lamps. This means that, after receiving grace, as everyone does, they did not take the trouble to kindle it within themselves, and they did not labor over themselves in order to give grace the scope to act fully within them. They extinguished grace, and so no light appeared: for there is no way for this to occur within us other than from grace.

Imagine how grief-stricken they were, when they stood at the door itself and were turned away. They could even hear the voice of the bridegroom; but He was not calling to them, He was driving them away. Lord have mercy! What an exceedingly bitter lot! Turn your thought to this parable a little more often, and attend with all care, so that no matter what happens, you will achieve your goal, and nothing will happen to you like what happened in the parable.

May the Lord bless you!

---

[1] Matthew 25:1-12.

28.

EXAMPLES OF THE FREE RESOLVE TO LIVE ACCORDING TO GRACE

Explanation of the free resolve to live according to grace by means of parables and examples.

I am rushing off a few more lines to send you in addition to what has already been said on the same subject.

At the Divine Judgement, those who have received grace and who have not allowed it to act within themselves will first of all have the gift of grace taken away, and then they will be plunged into hell. This was revealed by the Savior in the parable of the talent (Luke 19: 11-27). Each of the servants has been given a talent; grace is given to each person equally. One of the servants acquires ten more talents; a second servant acquires five more. A third servant acquires nothing; he says that he wrapped his talent in a napkin and set it aside. This means that the first servant worked more than the others in order to be imbued with grace; the second worked half as hard by comparison, but the third servant neglected the gift, not bothering in the least to kindle grace within himself. The reward is then given out in accordance with the labors expended on acquiring grace, or with the inner enlightenment of one's self under the action of grace. The last servant did nothing in this regard; from him was taken even that which he had, which was given to him so generously at the beginning.

Do you see how this matter goes, and how it ends? We, the baptized, have all received a talent, which is the grace of the Holy Spirit. This talent, as I have already mentioned, acts within us on its own at first, until we have grown up. As we

approach maturity, grace, although it is ready at any time to act within us, does not act. It waits until we freely and willingly incline to it, when we ourselves begin to desire its full action within us and begin to seek it. As soon as we begin seeking, grace immediately resumes its work within us, rousing us, directing and strengthening us. Our imbuing with grace comes about in proportion to our seeking and to the labor expended in this search. If we do not seek and do not labor toward this particular goal in this frame of mind, grace will not begin to act within us on its own against our will, as if by force. God gave man freedom, and He does not want to violate this; He does not want to enter into a person against his will and act within him. When a person of his own accord wants to be subject to Divine action, only then does God begin to act within him through grace. If God were to have His own way, everyone would become holy in a single instant. One Divine instant, and everyone would change. But **the law is such already that man must himself begin to desire and to seek, and then grace will not desert him, as long as he continues to trust in it.**

Recall the Savior's parable about the treasure hidden in the field and the merchant who is seeking goodly pearls (Matthew 13:44-46). A man found a treasure hidden in a field, and he went and sold all that he had and bought that field. Of course, he then dug up the treasure and became rich, although this is not mentioned in the parable. This field is our soul; the treasure, which is hidden inside of it, is grace, which is placed in it through Holy Baptism. The man's finding of the treasure in the parable signifies the moment when the Christian recognizes that within him is concealed such a treasure, to which nothing can compare—the grace of the Holy Spirit. He sold everything; this means he gave up everything he had that was dear to him to obtain the treasure, that is, to arouse and bring to the open the grace that is concealed within.

The other merchant dealt in precious stones. He heard there was a pearl to which there was nothing else equal, but the price for which no one in the local area seemed to know (I am adding this). Wishing to acquire the pearl, he sold everything he had and bought it. And of course, he became rich. This pearl of great price is the image of the Divine grace which is concealed within us, and which is unknown to us, until we acknowledge it. He who acknowledges it becomes convinced at the same time that there is nothing more valuable. Thus, with complete selflessness he gives up everything and strives to kindle and ignite that grace within himself.

From these parables you may see what exactly is expected of us. It is expected that we 1) *acknowledge the presence* of the gift of grace within us; 2) *comprehend that the value of the grace* for us is so great, that it is more precious than life itself, so that without it life is not even life; 3) desire with all our strength to *adapt* this grace *to ourselves*, and adapt ourselves to it, or, to put it another way, desire to imbue our entire nature with it, and to become enlightened and sanctified; 4) *resolve* to achieve this through the matter itself, and then 5) *carry this decision into reality*, putting everything else aside, or, having removed one's heart from everything, give it over to the full action of Divine grace. When these five acts have taken place within us, then comes the beginning of our internal rebirth, after which, if we continue to act in the same spirit unflaggingly, inner rebirth and illumination will grow quickly or slowly, depending on our labor, but most importantly, depending on our forgetfulness of self.

Remember how I was telling you about that governess who made a drastic change.[1] All this happened for her. Once she had begun, she did not look back, but instead went further and further, higher and higher. And she attained the fiery enkindling of grace. Divine grace makes no distinction as to who a person was before desiring it, but awaits only the desire. It begins its action immediately, as in the case of the Great Martyr St. Katherine who was pure, and in that of St. Mary of Egypt, who was formerly profligate. How many of these are there on this path today in Russia, known and unknown, both men and women, both widows and virgins? What blessed and most blessed souls they are! Blessed Augustine[1] for a long time was kept in the bonds of an unspiritual life, although he knew about the spiritual life and desired it. What was it that helped him to break these bonds? A story he heard about how St. Anthony the Great, an unlearned man of ordinary stock, shone with grace. Upon hearing the story, he cried out, "These simple ones are above us, leaving us behind with all of our learning and our importance among other people. And from this moment I mastered myself, and with ardor I set on that very same path along which St. Anthony walked."[2]

---

[1] Who had already reposed as Mother Magdalene at the Eletsk convent. Her story appeared in the 1876 *Strannik* (*Pilgrim*).

How is it to be for you and me? Will we make excuses and keep putting things off day after day?! May the Lord bestow His enlightening blessing upon you.

---

[1] Fr. Seraphim's note: "Important—Blessed Augustine mentioned."

[2] In particular, see Book VIII, chapters VI and XII of Blessed Augustine's *Confessions.*

29.

PATIENCE AND CONSTANCY

Resolve to live according to grace must not be limited merely to desire but must be accompanied by a readiness for labors and warfare, by a yearning to unfailingly attain what one desires. Having resolved this, one must immediately begin this task and continue with patience and constancy.

Not everything has been said yet. I shall undertake to write something more in addition to the above. The importance of the subject we are discussing compels this.

The radiance of the soul which Divine grace permeates completely, like fire permeates iron, is an attractive condition. Having heard this, everyone is ready to rush off with the desire of obtaining it. I suppose you have such an impulse. But this impulse, although it signifies that the soul knows how to choose for the better, does not express everything which is required here. You might rush headlong and suddenly stop; then nothing will have come of your impulse. No, the impulse alone is not enough: you need to examine the matter thoroughly and make a firm and unyielding decision, being aware of all the labors, obstacles and difficulties which lie ahead, so that you may stand up to them with courageous inspiration until the end of your life.

The search for the means by which Divine grace permeates our entire essence is the same as the search for the Kingdom of God, or the enkindling of zeal for the salvation of the soul, or the falling in love with and choosing of the One Thing above all. There are various names and expressions, but the goal is one. I chose the clearer aspect. No matter what you call it, the object in and of itself is supremely desirable; therefore it is impossible not to desire it. Ask anyone, “Do you want to go to Paradise, to the Heavenly Kingdom?” He will answer you immediately, “Yes, of course I do.” But then tell him, “Well, you must do this and that,” and his heart will sink. **Everyone wants to go to Heaven, but not everyone has the desire to labor toward this end.** I am saying this because it is not enough merely to desire. You need to resolve firmly to achieve without fail that which you desire. You also need to resolve firmly to begin the process itself of labor toward this. In order to make this clearer for you, **I will tell you how desires usually reach the point of decision.**

We think about many subjects, and we plan many actions. But we think about something for awhile, and then we forget it. This means that our heart was not in it, and so we did not remember it. If something is memorable, our heart is in it. If the heart is in something, it means that we like the subject. If we like something, then it is pleasant for us to think about, to keep in our thoughts, or to imagine. However, this may not stir any further desire to possess the thing, or if it is an action, to do it. We say that something is a good thing or a good deed, but it is up to us to fulfill it. We admire good things or good deeds, but we do not necessarily experience any inclination to reach out for them or toward them. **In order to begin to desire something, and in order for the desired object have personal meaning for us, it is necessary that it be either beneficial to us, or essential, or something which we like so much that without it life would be boring or unhappy.** When we see these aspects in some deed or thing, we cannot hold back our desire for it, and desire then forms inevitably. Let us suppose that we have desired something; is this all that is required? No. There are many desires which remain unfulfilled from lack of strength or concentration of energy in carrying them out. **In order for a desire to be fulfilled, it is necessary to elevate it to the level of** firm intention or decision, and it is necessary for the heart to say within itself, "No matter what happens, I will obtain such-and-such a thing, or I will accomplish such-and-such a deed." Once this has been pronounced within the heart, there immediately begins a thinking out of how to realize what has been decided. The means are considered; favorable conditions of time and place are devised; obstacles are foreseen, as well as measures for overcoming them; and there is a feasible overview of the entire course of the matter, from beginning to end. When all this has been mapped out in the heart, then it is completely ready to act.

Everything is ready for action, but the act itself still has not been realized; it must be begun, continued with constancy, patience, and corresponding diligence until it reaches its conclusion. Up to now, we have been describing the process as if we were preparing a lumber-cutting machine for its task: The steam is ready, the wood has been placed on it, and everything is set out as it should be. All that is left is to set it in motion, and work will be underway. This *setting in motion* is the crown of all previous preparation, as if nothing were to be added to the doing, except the accomplishing of the deed. Everything depends on this setting in motion. There still remains the most crucial act, in which all energy is concentrated, at the precise point of transformation of the desires into decisiveness and deed, when the decision has ripened and everything has been thought out for its accomplishment: *beginning to do it.* Do you think that this is so difficult, when everything has already been prepared? This, by the way, is the most difficult step. Everything up to the decision has occurred internally; now our internal action—the mental—must enter into the current of events and flow in line with the other ones. Just get the first step accomplished, and the condition itself, which already exists and into which the deed undertaken will enter, will begin to urge the deed on to action in the spirit and order in which it was begun. So there is the entire process for you!

I am telling you all of this to point out what you still need to complete within yourself, so that the desire you had when you rushed headlong into spiritual matters will be transformed into action. So that your desire does not fail to bloom, it is necessary to carry it from the beginning to the point of decision. This should not be a hasty decision, but a careful, deliberate, firm, rational, and most importantly, irrevocable decision. Then get down to work itself. First, everything must be accomplished inwardly through personal reflection, along with prayer to God to bring reason and enlightenment to the mind with respect to the extremely crucial matter at hand. The second thing will not be hard for you, judging by such customs as exist at your house.

May the Lord bless you, that the things set out above be accomplished within you!

30.

THE INNER STATE ACCORDING TO MACARIUS THE GREAT

An outline of the inner state enlightened by grace according to the words of Macarius the Great. The means to arouse and strengthen one's determination to lead a virtuous life.

I am impatient. I take up my pen, and am still just beginning to explain the very same thing to you, that is, the attractiveness of the condition of being filled with grace, in order to set you on the path to attaining it, learning it and being established in it. But this time, I will not offer you my own words, but those of that wise man of God, Macarius the Great, namely from his eighteenth homily.

"If anyone in the world is wealthy, and he has a hidden treasure, then he will acquire all that he wants through this treasure and wealth. So it is with those who have found and who already have the heavenly treasure (grace), for through this treasure they acquire every virtue, and accumulate even greater heavenly wealth for themselves. The Apostle says, *We have this treasure in earthen vessels* (2 Cor. 4:7); that is, being still in the flesh, we were worthy to find in ourselves the above mentioned treasure, the sanctifying power of the Spirit.

"He who has found and who has within himself this heavenly treasure of the Spirit is irreproachable, and accomplishes in purity every truth in accordance with the commandments and every virtuous deed without being compelled to do so, and without any difficulties. If we were to begin to implore God, we would begin seeking and asking that we too be given the treasure of His Spirit, and thus we would become irreproachable and abide in purity in all His commandments, carrying out every truth thoroughly and perfectly.

"It is necessary to force oneself to ask the Lord that He allow one to find and accept the treasure of the Spirit, to arrive at this condition without difficulty, and to carry out faultlessly and thoroughly all the commandments of the Lord with ease, which formerly could not be accomplished even with all one's strength. This treasure is acquired through diligent seeking, having faith and patience in one's labors throughout this seeking. It is necessary to ask God with sincere love and faith to allow us to find in our hearts His riches, in the power and efficacy of the Spirit."

What it is like for those in whom Divine grace has begun noticeably to manifest its action is depicted by St. Macarius in the following way:

"Sometimes they are mirthful, as if they were at the king's table, and rejoice with joy and inexpressible happiness. At other times they are like a bride, soothed by divine tranquility in the company of her bridegroom. And sometimes, even though they have bodies, they feel the very same lightness and wingedness as do the incorporeal angels. Sometimes it is as if they are soothed with drink, being made merry and tranquil with the Spirit, in ecstasy from the divine spiritual mysteries. Sometimes the Spirit inflames them with such love that, if it were possible, they would make room in their hearts for every man, not distinguishing the bad from the good. Sometimes, in the humble wisdom of the Spirit, they so abase themselves in front of each person, that they consider themselves to be the last and the least of all men. Sometimes their souls are tranquil in some great silence, in quiet and peace; sometimes they are instructed by grace in the understanding of something, in ineffable wisdom, in the knowledge of that which is impossible to express with speech. Sometimes they behave like ordinary people."

What a condition to long for! Here is yet another small sketch of the enlightenment by grace of the inner condition:

"When the soul aspires to the perfection of the Spirit, after it has been entirely cleansed of all the passions, and, after it has arrived at unity and dissolution with the Comforting Spirit in ineffable communion and being commingled with the Spirit, then it will be considered worthy of becoming spirit itself. Then it will become completely light, all-seeing, completely joyful, completely calm, completely loving, completely merciful, completely filled with grace and goodness."

That is what the holy ascetics attained and were trying to attain! You will agree that it was and is worth struggling for. Access to this realm is open to everyone. It is not some forbidden meadow or garden. Everyone has been promised these blessings, and the grace of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Chrismation serves as the advance deposit toward their acquisition. We have only to rummage in ourselves, and to obtain this treasure. The buried treasure is in our own garden, we have only to take up our shovel and start digging. Silver and gold will begin to sparkle with the very first thrusts of the spade, and then the entire treasure will come to view. There will be no measure to joy then.

Well then, why is my business with you at such an impasse?!

In the last letter I indicated to you the path that leads to persistence, but I did not mention which ideas in particular give rise to this decisiveness, and how it arrives at definitive effort. I will now briefly outline what is most important.

Even interest in a subject can stimulate energy, but in this case it is possible to put it aside until tomorrow. However, when one fully comprehends the extreme necessity and unavoidability of something on the one hand, and has the means for dealing with it on the other hand, then a decision is inevitably reached. Here is an example for you: Some sedentary, lazy person is sitting in his room; you would not call out to him that there is a fire; but just let him see fire, and he will dash out of there. He is driven by spirit. That is exactly what we must do with ourselves, and, in the case of indecisiveness, it is necessary to enkindle misfortune around ourselves, that is, to convince ourselves that we must do such-and-such a thing, or we will perish eternally. As soon as this is consciously grasped, all of our moral energy arises in full force, and draws us inevitably to action. Take a little trouble on your own to discover how to do this with regard to what we are speaking about. I would make mention for my part that death could come any time. What would happen upon death? Perhaps what happened to the cunning servant; his talent was taken away from him—the gift of grace, and he was thrown into eternal darkness! Or perhaps what happened to the foolish virgins, to whom the door was locked and who heard, "I don't know you!" Indeed, one or the other misfortune will be our lot, forever, if we do not enkindle grace within ourselves and if we are not enlightened by it. Place yourself in a situation such as those that have been explained, and I do not think that your indecisiveness, if you are indecisive, will be able to withstand it. This concept is most powerful. Another ancient sage uttered, *Remember the end of your life, and then you will never sin* (Sirach 7:39). Work at visualizing these explanations, and, once you are fully aware of them, do not weaken and do not lose sight of this consciousness. Read the book *Vostani Spyay* (*Arise and Conquer*) as an aid. You have already been given this book.

The availability of assistance is the second aspect. It provides courage and good hope for overcoming misfortune in the presence of the sense of doom, thus inspiring us to action. Were it not for this, the sense of impending doom would plunge us into despair. In the example given, were it not for the door ajar or the open window, there would be only one thing left for the man caught by the fire to do—tear out his hair. So it is with respect to our subject; in the total doom in which we are indeed placed (without grace it is impossible to escape being deprived of the Kingdom of Heaven), in the consciousness of such doom, all that would be left would be to fall into despair, were it not for the assistance which is available to us. But thanks be to the Lord, the means by which we may escape the inescapable doom beyond the grave is already prepared for us. Everything is prepared, we have it at hand, and it is even within us. All that is left is to get to work and act. Knowing all this, are we still going to continue to delay and put things off day after day?

With respect to you, I would add that you do not have to begin anything special. Live in that spirit in which you were brought up, and keep those pious customs which you note in your immediate family and relatives. The thrust of my entire discourse is this: That you wholeheartedly embrace this very way of life and that you of your own accord decide to live that way to the end. Your life up to this point really has not been yours.

You were guided in this way. It is very beneficial, but will not last, if you do not choose this particular life of your own accord, and set it for yourself as inviolable law. If you do not do this now, the evil spirit of worldly life will attract you, or you will end up as neither one thing nor the other, as I have already mentioned to you.

Think over all of this, for God's sake, and do not delay in making your decisions. May the Lord bless you!

31.

SUPPORTING THIS INITIAL YEARNING

How to support the initial yearning for the life of virtue. Spiritual reading and reflection. The recording of good thoughts. How to escape the wandering of one's thoughts by reading and prayer. Unceasing remembrance of God and death. Self-reproach.

Praise God! You write that you have a strong desire to draw closer to Him. Lord give the blessing! For my discourse has had no other purpose than that of inspiring you with that desire. **May you enkindle the fear of God within yourself. Know that when there is the fear of God it means that your spirit is alive and that Divine grace is acting within you. The first action of our spirit is the knowledge of God and the fear of God, and the primary gift of Divine grace is the fear of God. This fear of God is the beginning, the continuation and the completion of the path of salvation.** He who has a live, active fear of God has within himself an inexhaustible strength which sets into motion all that is pleasing to God, and which also acts as a bold sentry, who guards one from the enemy's attacks and from one's own falling into dissipation. May the Lord help you to enkindle and then to maintain within yourself in full force the spirit of this fear of God!

That you devote a little time in the morning to the reading of spiritual books is a very good thing. But who there with you is reacting to this so unfavorably? If you were to persist in nothing else besides reading and prayer, then of course that would be out of order; but what is wrong with a little bit of reading and prayer?! As far as I know, all devout and God-fearing people do this. I believe your parents keep the very same rule. **This reading with prayer preceding strengthens the soul and gives it strength for the entire day. Doctors say you should not leave the house on an empty stomach. With respect to the soul, this is fulfilled by morning prayer and reading. The soul is fed by them, and sets out on the business of the day nourished.**

Something came to mind that I would like to suggest to you. **Get a notebook,**[1] and in it write down the thoughts that come to you as you read the Gospel and other books in this manner: "The Lord says such and such in the Gospel; from this it is obvious that we must act in such and such a way; for me this is feasible in such and such instances; I will act thus; Lord help me!" This does not require much effort, but how much benefit comes from it! Act in this way. Your thought will come into focus and become inspired. The Spirit, moving in the Scriptures, will enter into your heart and heal it. This is balm for wounds!

What can be done about thoughts running about every which way during reading and prayer? No one is free from this. There is no sin in this, but it is out of place. It is a sin when someone willfully develops within himself alien thoughts, but when they run off involuntarily, is there any fault? The fault comes about when somebody who has noticed straying thoughts continues to stray in them. It is necessary to do this: As soon as you notice your thought wandering off, immediately put it back in its place.

---

[1] Fr. Seraphim's note: "The importance of keeping a journal."

For diminishing the straying of thought during prayer, it is necessary to make an effort to pray with warm feeling. To do this, it is necessary to warm the soul before prayer with meditation and with bows. Learn to pray with your own prayer. For example, the essence of evening prayer is to thank God for the day and for everything that one has met in the course of it, both good and bad. For the wrong which has been done, one must repent and ask forgiveness, promising to make amends the following day; then one prays to God for protection during sleep. Say all of this to God from your mind and from your heart. The essence of morning prayer is to thank God for sleep and revitalizing, and to ask Him to help to do things throughout the day for His glory. Again, say this to Him with all your heart and mind. While you are at it, both in the morning and the evening, make known your vital needs to the Lord, both inner needs and outer ones, speaking to Him like a child: "See, Lord, my illness and weakness! Help me and heal me!" All this and similar things you may say to God in your own words, without using your prayerbook. Maybe this will be better. Try this, and if it works, you may put aside your prayerbook altogether; if it does not work, however, then you should pray with your prayerbook, or else you may be left entirely without prayer.

So that the words of the prayers in the prayerbook take on meaning and warm the heart, you should sit down in your free time, other than the time when you are at prayer, and think out thoroughly the content of the prayers, and become keenly aware of them. Then when you read the prayers during prayer-time, whether in the morning or evening, all those thoughts and feelings which came to you during meditation will be renewed, and they will collect your attention and warm your heart. Never read a prayer hurriedly. Another thing: Try to learn the prayers by heart. This greatly aids undistracted prayer. A prayer must be learned just like anything else.

Learn to think of God not only when you are standing at prayer, but also at every hour and at every minute, for He is everywhere. From this peace will pour into your heart, giving strength for daily business and a regulating of affairs. Your present desire of drawing closer to God will be completely realized in this way. Just as someone standing in the sunshine is warm, so too is the person who always remembers God.

Add to remembrance of God the remembrance of death and of eternal bliss or damnation. These two remembrances will divert us from everything evil, even in thought, and direct us to everything good, not just for show, but in truth. Some think mistakenly that remembrance of death poisons life. It does not poison life, but instead teaches us to be careful and to abstain from everything that does poison life. If we were to remember death a little more, there would be less confusion in our lives, both personal and collective.

You reproach yourself for pride. Good, very good. Be on the lookout for its appearance and immediately cut it off. Pride likes to do everything for itself, but you are to do everything for the glory of God and the good of others, not thinking of yourself, not having pity for yourself. Indeed, the proud outwardly do most of the very same things that those who are not proud do, except that they have a different direction and different intentions in everything. Our job is to redirect these intentions from pride to self-reproach, and then direct our actions in line with this. This must be learned. Learn, learn. Lord give the blessing!

You want me to scold you without mercy. Nothing would come of this. To me, you have been chaste and pure so far. It remains for me to wish that the Lord always keep you the way you have seemed to me; if you are not like that in actual fact, may He vouchsafe to make you so.

32.

GOVENIE: THE PATH OF A VIRTUOUS LIFE

One who has resolved to stand on the path of a virtuous life must consciously fast. Instruction on proper govenie. The conduct of one preparing for Confession and Communion in church.

Glory be to Thee, O Lord! The fast has drawn near. You have brought me pleasure by saying that you intend to begin fasting and attending Divine Services immediately.[1] Do not change your intention. People usually fast and attend services during Holy Week, but do not put it off until then yourself.

---

[1] Trans. note: In the opening paragraph to this letter, St. Theophan uses the words *post*, *govet* (verb) and *govenie* (noun). The first is translated as "fast," here referring to the Lenten fast, which is familiar to Christians in the West. The second word is occasionally translated as "fast," but its meaning is actually more complex, implying customs associated with the fasting periods in the Orthodox Church that are today unknown in the Western churches. *Govenie*, according to the *Polnyy Tserkovno-Slavyanskiy Slovar* (*Complete Church Slavonic Dictionary*), is "the reverential custom of the Greek-Russian Orthodox Church. According to it, on one of the weeks of any fast period (primarily that of Great Lent), the Christian abstains not only from rich foods, but also from the immoderate consumption of the most simple foods, if not for the entire week, then two or three days of it, before going to confession and to partake of the Holy Mysteries; at the same time he participates in daily church services. It is quite interesting and helpful to examine the root of this word: In Sanskrit, *go* means speech, especially in the spiritual sense; *hava* means a sacrifice; *gu* means to sacrifice. Hence, judging from this one may think that, in ancient times, govenie consisted of prayers combined with sacrifices. For the sake of brevity, the term *govenie* will be used from this point on without translation.

Those who fast and attend services during Holy Week include people who have already fasted, attended services and taken Communion during the preceding weeks who desire to take Communion a second time; those who are compelled by some sort of necessity; or those for whom it is desirable to hasten the end of the labor of the fast, for there are only three days to labor. We will apply only the first case to you.

Lord give the blessing for you to perform *govenie* in a fitting manner. Each faster must do everything that you intend to do. Fast, go to church, seclude yourself, read, think and study yourself; all of this is necessary. But all of these actions must be directed toward one goal: worthy Communion of the holy Mysteries of Christ. In order to commune worthily, the soul must be cleansed with repentance. All the various actions of *govenie*—going to church, prayer at home, fasting, and everything else, are undertaken in order to accomplish the repentance as it should be, with sincere contrition and a firm resolution to not offend the Lord anymore.

The first thing to do in making repentance is to go inside yourself. Earthly matters and cares and unrestrained wandering of thoughts all over the place do not allow us to go inside ourselves and to study ourselves. Therefore the faster, to the extent possible during the time of the fast, shuts off his cares, and instead of going about his usual business, stays at home. This cutting off of cares is a matter of extreme importance in *govenie.* He who does not do so will certainly spend the fast haphazardly. You, too, must cut off your cares. No matter how few these cares are, they do exist and distract us. Set about *govenie* having laid aside all cares.

Let us suppose that you have cast everything aside and have gone to your room. What is there to do? It is possible to sit around in private doing nothing. You must take up occupations that are conducive to *govenie.* What kind of occupations? Prayer, reading, meditation.

Prayer is that which is in addition to prayer in church. That is already self-evident. You know how to pray in church, of course. However, do take it into consideration! Go to church willingly, as to the house of God, your own home; go there without being contemptuous or bored. Go to church not just to be at the service, but in order to pray from your heart. Pray with sincere warmth, with an outpouring before God, with feelings of contrition, humility and reverential fear and with diligent petitions for your vital spiritual needs. To succeed at this, you have to think it out ahead of time, and, having come to church, you must force yourself to it. Do not just consider attendance at the service to be useless; during the course of the service the heart is warmed and calls out warmly to God. That is the main thing. You must also listen to the service, and align your thoughts and feelings with it. Variation, as long as it is directed toward one goal and is not distracting, will maintain the attention's nourishing and constructive exertion in an agreeable manner. Attend to what is being sung and read, especially during the petitions, for they are the summary of all of the needs for which we turn to God unashamedly.

Usually, however, the thoughts do stray. This is from a lack of prayerful feeling. However, you may deal with straying thoughts in this way: As soon as you notice your thoughts have left church, turn them back and do not ever allow yourself consciously to daydream or to stray in thought during *govenie*, or at any other time. When the thoughts stray unbeknownst to you, this is also a small sin; but when you begin wandering off in thought purposely while you are in church, this is a sin. The Lord is among those who are in church. He who does not think about the Lord in church, but who daydreams instead, is like a man who has gone to the king in order to ask him for something, who then begins to make faces and fidget in the king's presence, without paying any attention to him. Perhaps you will not be completely successful in preventing the straying of thoughts while maintaining your effort; but it is possible and it is necessary to not allow yourself to daydream intentionally. With respect to the straying of thoughts there are these two rules: 1) As soon as you notice this straying, turn the thoughts back, and 2) do not consciously allow the thoughts to wander.

A remedy against the straying of thoughts is mental attention, attention to the fact that the Lord is before us and we are before Him. One must place the entire mind in this thought and not deviate from it. The attention is attached to the Lord by the fear of God and by the desire to please God. From these come warmth of the heart, which draws the attention to the One Lord. Work at stirring the heart, and you will see for yourself how it keeps the thought in check. It is necessary to force yourself. Without labor and mental effort you will not attain anything spiritual. Prostrations help a lot in the warming of the heart. Do these a little more often, performing both bows from the waist and full prostrations to the ground.

May the Lord grant that you feel delight in being at church so that you will rush to it, just as people rush into a warm room from the cold. During the fast, the primary stimulator of action, the reason for which we perform *govenie*, is worthy attendance at church. Other actions aid and assist this, but they will be discussed another time.

33.

GOVENIE AND CONDUCT AT HOME

Continuation concerning govenie. Conduct at home.

I shall continue our discussion of *govenie*. **The person performing *govenie* knows only church and home. Suppose you have just come home; what is there? Even at home it is necessary to maintain a God-pleasing turning of heart and mind to the Lord** with as much strength as possible. Hurry to your room right after church and greet it with several prostrations, reverently asking the Lord that you spend the time ahead of you alone at home in a way that will benefit the soul. Then you need to sit down and rest for a while. Do not let the thoughts stray even at this point, but say to yourself, not thinking about anything, Lord have mercy! Lord have mercy! Once you have rested, you need to do something; either pray or do some handicraft. Which handicraft you do does not matter; you already know what you like to do. It is impossible to occupy oneself with spiritual things all the time; you need to have some sort of enjoyable handicraft. However, do it when the soul is fatigued, and you are not capable of reading, thinking or praying to God. If your spiritual pursuits are going well, then you do not have to have a handicraft. It is meant for occupying time, which otherwise would be spent in idleness, always most pernicious, and all the more so during *govenie*.

How is one to pray at home? You said it well, that **one has to add a little to the usual prayer rule.** Yes, that is necessary. It **is better if you do not just read more prayers; instead, you should pray a little more without the prayerbook, expressing your vital spiritual needs to the Lord in your own words.** In

the morning and evening, read no more than on ordinary days, but before the beginning of the recited prayer and afterward, pray your own prayers. In between the prayers that you read, insert your own prayer with prostrations, both from the waist and to the ground, and from a kneeling position. Importune the Lord, the Mother of God and your Angel Protector, expressing everything to Them in your own words, everything that you feel is of extreme necessity for you. Pray that They grant you to know yourself, and once you have this knowledge, that They furnish you with the desire and strength to remedy the irremediable, and, even more, that They fill the heart with the spirit of contrition and humility, these being a sacrifice to God, the most suitable to Him. But do not make a rule that is too long and drawn out for you. It is better to stand at prayer a little more often and to make a few prostrations during the course of the day, doing this frequently, so that the entire day is filled with prostrations. Do not take your mind off of the Lord at all; either stand at prayer or do something else.

After prayer, do some reading with meditation. You need to read, not in order to pack your mind with diverse information and ideas, but to receive edification and to understand how best to accomplish those things which are necessary for us during these days of *govenie*. For this one must read a little, but each **item that is read must be brought to conscious feeling by devoting lengthy attention to it.**

What should be read? Just spiritual books, of course. Of these, I cannot recommend anything to you more than the writings of Bishop Tikhon.[1] There is the little book *Arise and Conquer*, a selection of articles by him that are conducive to repentance. There is another book about repentance and Communion, sermons on Great Lent and the preparatory week preceding it. I have heard that it is very helpful at this time; it discusses only repentance and Communion. I cannot find any better reading for you. These books have been given to you. Take them and read them.

---

[1] St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, Bishop of Voronezh (1724-1783).

Unhurried, meditative reading of suitable books will inspire the soul more forcefully than anything else. Apply yourself to this. In the morning after prayer (matins is heard in the evening), devote everything to it until the Hours. It also serves as preparation for church prayer. After the Hours you may continue, as long as there is the desire and attention. If there comes a prayerful urge during your reading, stand up and pray. Should you read with somebody or alone? It is better to do it alone, because this is more conducive to studying yourself and to continuing what you are reading for yourself. You must insert meditation into the reading, because reading alone will dissipate into daydreaming, and you will not be able to refocus on it.

So, **you have done your reading, meditated, performed prostrations and all the studies appropriate for one observing *govenie* at home.** However, you will not be able to keep your mind in such a state of continual exertion at all times. When you get tired, you may sit and work for a little while, as I have already mentioned to you.

You also said well that **it is necessary to fast a little. Yes, it is necessary, but not too much. You already eat so little. It is necessary to have strength to stand in church and make prostrations at home. Do whatever you find is comfortable and convenient for you.** It is necessary to let the body know that it is the cause for having to repent, and that it must therefore bear the labors of *govenie*. It is also necessary to cut back the amount and restfulness of sleep a little. This item, it seems, will demand sacrifice of you. To the best of your ability, do not neglect this. **Every form of deprivation is suitable during this time.**

What about conversation? One may converse, not about trifling things, but about spiritual things. **Instead of conversation, it would be better to set aside an hour for reading together.** This would be very suitable in the evening. Nothing would be better, if one of you could give edifying accounts that manifest the power of repentance and Communion. **For your readings together, you should select something from the Lives of the Saints.**

That is enough for now. I will add whatever else is needed later.

34.

PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

Continuation concerning govenie. Preparation for Confession. Reviewing one's life.

We will continue our discussion of *govenie.*

Everything that has been said is the framework in which *govenie* is placed, or the outward rite and performance of it, which is usually observed by good fasters. Work a little to adhere to it, if you want to be a good faster. Do not just adopt a sad countenance, do not disfigure your face.[1] Do everything with willingness, with a good and joyful disposition of spirit. Spend your time in the same way that people who are going to a feast with the king spend time. Such people think and talk only about what the feast is going to be like, how they will meet with the king, what to say when he greets them, how to dress best and not smudge their face, and the like. Ahead of you, however, lies something incomparably better and higher: A feast, not with an earthly king, but with the Heavenly King. If you will take a little trouble to get yourself dressed and prepared in a way that will please the King, then you will be favored by Him: You will receive that which is priceless, and you will have unspeakable joy.[1]

---

[1] Matthew 6:16.

You said you would begin to fast; then fast! Lord give the blessing! Think, if you please, how you are going to dress. Get rid of your old dresses, new ones are necessary. If one of the old ones seems suitable, wash it, iron it, and make everything look like it is entirely new. By this I want to say that you need to reexamine yourself; acknowledge what is bad and throw it out, but keep the good, correct it and perfect it.

Let us go inside ourselves then, and begin to look over what is within.

The interference of any outsider in this matter is inappropriate and completely impossible. No one except for you yourself can go inside of yourself and analyze the workings of your conscience. You will want to do this yourself. I will give you only a few instructions. In the books which you were told to read, there is much in the way of instruction concerning this. I will tell you a few more things, however.

To examine yourself well, you must turn your attention to the three aspects of our active life. These aspects are 1) the actions, those isolated acts which are performed at a given time in a given place and under given circumstances; 2) the disposition of the heart and the characteristic tendencies which are concealed beneath the actions; and 3) the general character of life.

Our entire life is made up of an uninterrupted series of acts: thoughts, words, deeds; some giving way to others, with these in turn being followed by still others. Look over all these acts, each one separately; there is no way to define their moral value. Even if you took it into your head to review and reassess the acts you have accomplished in one day, you would not be able to do it. Man is a creature of perpetual motion. How many times does he change his mind and re-do things from morning until evening! How many things does he commit from confession to confession! How is one to be then? There is no necessity to review and reassess everything separately. You have an unsleeping guard, your conscience. When something evil is done, it does not let it slip by, and no matter how you try to justify it to your conscience, it will not cease evaluating everything in its own way: This is evil, that is evil. **Here then is your *first step*: Listen to your conscience and all those actions which it exposes to you, without any excuse, acknowledge as sinful and prepare to confess them.**

---

[1] The preceding passage draws imagery from Matthew 22:1-14, the parable of the marriage feast.

We may call this the first and the last step; that is, the admission that one is undeniably guilty of what the conscience has revealed, and the decision to avoid it in the future. This would be sufficient, if it were possible to be certain that the conscience itself is correct in everything. It does happen that the conscience does not notice something because of some sort of confusion; it might forget something because of old age, and it may not consider something to be a sin out of ignorance and incomplete knowledge of what actions are necessary for us. **So it is a necessity here for the conscience to turn for assistance to the commandments of God that are depicted in the Word of God, and, in reviewing them, to find out if we have done anything contrary to any of them. By doing this, we may recall much which we have forgotten, and much of that which is recalled will be presented in a form other than how we interpreted it.**

The Word of God becomes like a mirror. Just as each person, when looking in a mirror, sees a blemish or spot on his face or clothing, so the soul, when reading the Word of God and examining the commandments which are enumerated there, cannot help but see whether it is correct in all of these commandments or not. The conscience, enlightened by this Word of the living God, will tell this to the soul at once quite frankly. **Here then is the *second step* for you. Go over the commandments and see whether you carry them out or not.** For example, the commandment enjoins us to offer charity every time someone asks for it. Look at yourself, do you always offer it, or not? Do you sometimes refuse it, not because of any important reason, but simply because you scorn the beggar? If this turns out to be the case, take note: It is a *sin.* The commandment says to forgive everyone everything, even that which is unpleasant and offensive. Look at yourself again, to see whether you are always deferential; haven't you had disputes, heated words, and maybe even quarrels? If you can recall any, note once again: It is a *sin*, although the conscience does not always place such actions in this category. Again, you must place all your hope in God. Have you always done this? In the usual course of action you do not notice it. But when you meet with need, it immediately surfaces and becomes apparent on what your soul relies, whether on God or whether you forget about God and rely on something else. It is obvious that you must use all of your abilities in order to pull through difficult situations, for they too are from God, but final success can be hoped for only from God, which is why we pray to Him for help, and when something turns out well, we thank Him as the Sole Deliverer, disregarding our own abilities. Take a look, have you acted in this way? If not, take note once again: It is a *sin.* Do this with each commandment, and note which actions you have committed against which commandment. In this way you will make a detailed examination of your actions.

What is the best way to do this? **Have you studied the catechism? In it each commandment is explained and it is shown which good deeds are required of us with each com-**

mandment, and which sins are forbidden. Take this and review your actions with its assistance. I recall that at your house you have a book by Bishop Platon of Kostroma that tells how to give Confession and how to confess. In it is a very thorough enumeration of many questions, which are to be asked of those who are taking Confession. Perhaps by using this book it will be even easier for you to examine yourself.

I suppose you would like to study yourself in the proper way for the first time, and to determine what you are and what is in you. Work on reviewing yourself thoroughly according to these instructions. Later on, it will not be so complicated for you. But work on it a little for now.

I will cover what still remains for you to do after this the next time I write.

35.

THE DISPOSITION OF ONE'S HEART

Continuation. Reviewing the disposition of one's heart.
Designating the chief character or spirit of one's life.

To continue. *The second aspect of life is the disposition or the mood and inclination of the heart.* Actions do not provide full knowledge of the self. It is necessary to look more deeply into oneself and to examine what your heart is like, paying more attention to this than to actions. Suppose a man who is normally kind-hearted happens to behave stubbornly on a single occasion (say he fails to help somebody). Then you encounter another person who behaves in the same way, not just by chance, but because he is stingy by nature. On the surface, both actions are identical, but going by the inner disposition of the actors, there is a big difference between them. Acts are actions isolated in time and in place, while dispositions signify permanent inclinations of the heart by which the character and way of life of a person are defined, and from which come all his greatest desires and the direction for his acts. The good dispositions are called virtues, while the worst are called vices, depraved inclinations and passions.

Christ the Savior indicates which dispositions a Christian must have in his heart. These are humility, contrition, meekness, love of righteousness and truth, mercifulness, pureheartedness, love of peace, and patience. The Apostle St. Paul indicates the following blessed Christian dispositions of the heart, which are **the fruits of the Holy Spirit:** ***Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance*** (Gal. 5:22, 23). In another place he writes, *Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful* (Col. 3:12-15). **In contrast to these dispositions are the vices or passions, the sources of all the evil deeds that ruin us. The main ones are pride, vanity, selfishness, intemperateness, anger, hatred, envy, idleness, desire for sensual pleasures, gloom, despair.** Concerning these, the Apostle decreed that not only should Christians not possess them, but also that they should not mention them among themselves: *Let it not be once named among you* (Eph. 5:3).

You see how rigorous this is! Please examine yourself thoroughly to see if you have any bad inclinations and passions. Everyone possesses each one of them to a small degree, but they are not deeply rooted or permanent. And **everyone has one main passion around which all the others entwine themselves. You** must take care to seek this one out above all. Although because of your youth such a passion will not be obvious, there should be perceptible traces if you probe. After you have found it, assess the others; find the one that is closest to it, and the one that is farthest. And you will understand the structure of your heart. What a valuable acquisition! Because after this, when you purge yourself of passions and bad inclinations, then it will be apparent to you where to direct your efforts and strength, namely, at your main passion. Then you will overcome it, and all the others will disperse in and of themselves. As in war, once the main enemy force has been shattered, you have only to pursue the others and rout them without any trouble. It is easy to correct deeds. Just do not do it. The heart, however, cannot be transformed and corrected all at once. A struggle lies ahead. In this struggle, if you do not know where to direct your blows, you will exhaust yourself thrashing about to no purpose, and you will not achieve any success. Take a little trouble!

The third aspect of life is the spirit of life. This is the most important as well as the most complex element. A malicious spirit is so subtle and so able to mask itself with a facade of kindness and opportuneness that one must have the sharpest spiritual vision in order to detect it. A good spirit, on the other hand, is obvious, because it has a unique purpose; that is, having put everything else aside, it lives for God. Contrary to this is the spirit that lives for itself (egoism). This type of spirit very often, if not always, adopts a secondary direction: living for the world.

Thus, if we suppose that the spirit of one's life is indicated by who it is a person lives for, it should be easy for you to determine the spirit of your life. This is accomplished once you have determined who it is you live for, or, as you are still just starting out in life, who it is you most wish to live for, what it is you strive for in your heart, and to whom you will to

dedicate your life the most. The spirit of your life, even though your life is still in an embryonic stage like a feeble baby bird, is defined by the characteristics of that to which you most incline. He who lives for God has a God-fearing spirit that endeavors to please the One God. He who lives only for himself has a spirit that is self-pleasing, egoistical, selfish, carnal. He who lives for the world has a world-loving or vain spirit. Going by these characteristics, look and see what kind of spirit breathes in you.

Judging from the fact that you were filled with the desire to draw closer to God, it must be supposed that the main spirit of your life is good, the true spirit is good, as it should be. Again, judging from the fact that you reacted so adversely to the secular way of life in which there is the spirit of the world, it must be supposed that such a spirit has no place or power in you, although it may come over you if you are not careful. Whether or not you possess an egoistical spirit still remains under question. It seems to me that it is there, although to what extent I do not know. So what if it is present; since you have expressed the desire to draw closer to God, your soul does not belong to the world, and your egoistical spirit will soon dissipate if you give more and more rein to your heart for the kindling of desire for God. Please take this into consideration.

Thus you see what lies ahead for you to do; do it. At first glance, it appears to be an enormous task, but in actual fact it is simple and easy. Pray to God, begin the task, and you can determine everything in a single evening. You do not have to cross oceans, just examine what is within yourself. However, do not put this off until the evening before Confession. No, begin at this very moment, at the start of the fast. You will gradually discover everything in a thorough and clear manner. It will be difficult, perhaps, but only this one time. If you then begin to live according to the inclination of your good spirit, then life itself will lead you to a more complete self-knowledge. For why is it that we do not know ourselves for the most part? Because we live in a careless manner.

Let us suppose that you have reexamined yourself thoroughly and that you have found many faults. What should you do next? What do you gain from such knowledge? I will write you about this next time.

36.

THE MYSTERY OF REPENTANCE AND COMMUNION

Complete preparation for the Mystery of Repentance and Communion. Necessary feelings of one who is repenting. A beneficial reminder about Blessed Theodora and her journey through the toll-houses.

What use can you make of the knowledge you have achieved of yourself? First of all, you should judge yourself in all your shortcomings, without making any excuses or justifications. At the Presanctified Liturgy, after the choir sings, "Lord I have cried unto thee," the reader recites, "O let not my heart be inclined to any evil thing, let me not be involved in ungodly works." This suggests to Christians to pray that God not allow them to be filled with craftiness to think up excuses for sins. Do not expect repentance from a person who thinks up such excuses; he who has no repentance cannot begin self-correction. Consequently, the main thing is that to judge yourself without pity, you must bring yourself to the point where you can sincerely utter in your heart, "I am completely guilty."

When you come to say in your heart "I am guilty," then you must apply the fear of the Divine Judgment. If your own conscience condemns you, then God Himself does not excuse you. And God does see you as guilty. If you are seen as such, then you are condemned as such. If you are condemned, then you are sentenced and a fitting punishment is decided upon. This punishment will fall on you sooner or later, and it is already hanging over you when you are condemned by God.

How then should one be? A person would not know how he is to be if there were no Divine grace. A gracious God gives us the hope of forgiveness of guilt, if we repent with contrition and set forth a firm intention to flee past sins and not anger God by them. This is the essence of repentance.

Do not just be a passionless seeker of your shortcomings; mourn them, and sincerely regret that they were committed. Mourning begets the humble resolution to flee shortcomings; while knowledge alone, although it is accompanied by the intention to be cautious, leads to pride, from which deliver us, O Lord!

Once you have made the decision to flee your faults, it is then necessary to plan and decide how to do this successfully, so that you can begin the actual healing of yourself from this moment on. Suppose, for example, that you get angry at something: Do not get angrier. Then decide the best way to correct yourself so that you do not get angry again. Do the same thing with everything else. You must do this now, before the fact: Decide how you are going to act in a particular instance so that you do not repeat a shortcoming. The best way to go about this is to write down your shortcomings as soon as you are aware of them, and then write out a prescription for how you intend to correct them. This will be your first general and completely corrective Confession. Put a little effort into doing this, for the sake of the Lord. You will see what control you acquire over yourself, how powerfully you begin to restrain yourself, with the awareness that this way of acting and no other is the right one.

Along with mourning for one's sins and resolving not to sin, it is necessary to add diligent prayer to the Lord so that He will grant His help in opposing sin, and also to believe that the Lord will not withhold such help. Christians must possess the firm conviction that the sins they mourn and confess and promise to flee from are forgiven them by the Lord's grace for the sake of His death on the Cross. They must also believe that at the same time the Divine blessing is being given for the avoidance of sin by virtue of that same death on the cross. This blessing is bestowed in the presence of a strong resolution not to sin and a clear, firm belief in Christ the Savior.

When you finish doing these things, you will be ready for Confession, and when you receive absolution for your sins at Confession, you will be ready for Holy Communion. When you are sincerely repentant and have a firm resolution to make amends, the Lord comes in His Holy Mysteries and enters into you, and He will be with you and you will be with Him. Oh, great and unutterable grace of God the All-Beneficent!

It has occurred to me to tell you something! Take the Lives of the Saints for the month of March and read **the story of how blessed Theodora endured toll-houses.**[1] This story is included in the life of St. Basil the Younger for March 26. The life itself of that starets is great. Begin immediately with the story of Theodora; you can find where it begins from the notes in the margins.

Here is a short life of the elder: Basil the Younger lived in the desert not far from Constantinople. He was seized as a spy and after enduring tortures he was finally cast into the sea. God miraculously delivered him from drowning, and he came secretly to the city where a kind person gave him refuge. The elder again took up his ascetic labors as he had done in the desert, and during this time Theodora waited on him fervently. This holy woman died before the elder. Basil had another disciple, Gregory, a layman who was very God-fearing. Gregory wanted to know what Theodora had received for her devoted service to St. Basil. He asked the elder about this. The elder prayed, and then Gregory had a dream in which he saw Theodora in Paradise, in a place prepared for Basil; it was bright, very bright. Gregory asked Theodora how she had separated from her body, and how she had attained such a blessed place. The blessed Theodora replied with the story of how she had died and the toll-houses she then underwent. This is the story which I advise you to read with close attention. It is very instructive. It will guide you toward self-knowledge and instill within you a renewed conviction in the force of tearful repentance and Confession. Until you can obtain the book, I shall paraphrase the story for you.

---

[1] On toll-houses see *Soul After Death*, by Fr. Seraphim Rose, Platina, 1993.

St. Theodora underwent twenty toll-houses. 1) The *first* is in which one is tormented by the sins of idle, unruly, vulgar, and scandalous human word and speech; of blasphemy, ridicule, bawdy worldly songs, indecent exclamations, laughter, and raucous laughter. 2) The *second* toll-house is that of falsehoods, in which one is tormented by every sort of falsehood, especially perjury; the taking of God's name in vain; false witness; the breaking of vows made to God; confession of sins which have not actually occurred, and other similar kinds of falsehood. 3) The *third* is the one of judgment and slander, the defamation of one's neighbors, making fun of their shortcomings and sins. 4) The *fourth* is that of gluttony, sensuality, satiation, feasting, drunkenness, violation of fasts. 5) The *fifth* is that of sloth, in which one is tormented by all the days and hours spent in idleness; parasites and hirelings who do not deserve the wages they are being paid; those who are not joyful at church services on Sundays and feast days; those who are bored during Matins and Liturgy; those who are indifferent towards matters concerning their salvation. 6) The *sixth* is different kinds of theft. 7) The *seventh* is love of money and stinginess. 8) The *eighth* is usury and every kind of exploitation. 9) The *ninth* is injustice, in which are tormented judges who make unjust judgments, acquitting the guilty, condemning the innocent, and those who withhold a worker's pay or maintain incorrect weights and measures when buying and selling. 10) The *tenth* is envy, hatred, hatred of one's brother and hatred of one's friend. 11) The *eleventh* is pride, vanity, conceit, contempt, boastfulness, failure to honor one's parents, disobedience to authority. 12) The *twelfth* is anger and wrath. 13) The *thirteenth* is bearing grudges; holding anger in one's heart against someone who is close; vindictiveness; and the repaying of evil for evil. 14) The *fourteenth* is murder, where it is not criminal acts that torment, but also any sort of wounding, such as striking somebody about the head and shoulders out of vexation; slapping somebody in the face; pushing somebody out of anger. 15) The *fifteenth* is sorcery, charms, the use of potions, incantations, and invocations of demons. 16), 17), 18) The *sixteenth, seventeenth,* and *eighteenth* are carnal sins. 19) The *nineteenth* is heresy, of incorrect knowledge of one's faith; falling away from Orthodoxy; desecration of God and all that is holy. 20) The *twentieth* is lack of mercy, heartlessness, and the cutting off of one's generosity toward the needs of the poor.

Blessed Theodora encountered the same things which every soul encounters. The Apostle called the demons the principalities of the air. They are evil and obtrusive: Would they let a soul pass, when it is to ascend to the Divine Throne, without attempting to seize it or at least to disturb it with their terrors? How is one to be? For our great comfort the tears of repentance along with repentant deeds, especially that of almsgiving, wash away all sins. Blessed Theodora saw many times how the demons would bring scrolls in which her sins were recorded, and when they would unroll these scrolls to expose her, there would be nothing inside. When she asked the angels who attended her why this was so, they explained to her that when somebody sincerely repents of his sins, fasts, prays, and does merciful deeds, his sins are washed away.

Do not desire to be worldly-wise, but take this story to heart, and undertake to correct all your imperfections in accordance with its teaching.

37·

HARMONY WITH THE WILL OF GOD

The awakening resolve to amend one's life must be clearly distinguished as a yearning to act in regard to everything in harmony with the will of God. The peace and the joy of the servants of God. A warning about an incomplete resolve to live according to God. One who is neither hot nor cold will be rejected by God.

I have not heard whether you have begun the fast. Well, when you do begin, it would be useful for you to read everything that I have written to you about fasting. In the meantime, I will add a few words to clarify several points, because the subject is too complex to explain in just a few lines.

Let us suppose that you have placed yourself in a frame of mind for fasting, or are observing at least the outward procedure of fasting, and have begun in the meantime to scrutinize yourself strictly in accordance with the instructions you have been given, so that having examined all these imperfections, you may begin to be diligent in all things.

We need a good definition of the phrase *to be diligent.* This is the heart of the matter; if a person is not cognizant of it, he can make a gross error, believing in the meantime that he is doing everything correctly.

Let us begin to be diligent. In what way then are we bad now? What is wrong with our behavior? I think that even you have had the experience of not knowing what you are going to say at Confession, because it is not apparent what you are sinful in. How could you have come to think that way? From it being unclear as to what our lives must be like, and whether our deeds and our thoughts are directed toward that end. How could this be unclear when, in looking at your life in general, it strikes you that it, like everyone else's life, is wicked and meaningless? Do we remain calm within ourselves, saying or only secretly feeling that there is still something missing?

Everything that has been written thus far has been in opposition to this so that you will not be afflicted by it. If you act in accordance with what has been instructed, then you will not even say, "What is missing?" Pay a little more attention to this.

That is what it is all about, as we have said more than once! **Our entire lives, in all of their parts and details, must be devoted to God. The general rule is that everything you do should be done according to Divine will and for the sake of pleasing God, in praise of His Most Holy Name.**[1] Thus, we should examine each act which occurs to see if it is in compliance with the Divine will and then perform it with the conviction that it is totally in compliance with it and is pleasing to God. A person who always acts with such discretion and in the clear consciousness of pleasing God with his actions cannot fail at the same time to acknowledge that his life is proceeding truthfully. Although his acts are not brilliant or perfect, he permits nothing consciously in them that would offend God or would not be pleasing to Him. This consciousness fills his heart with peaceful quiet from the tranquillity of the conscience, and with that spiritual joy which is borne of the feeling that he is not alien to God. For although he is not great, or distinguished, or famous, he is still His servant who tries in every way possible to please Him, directs all his efforts toward this, and believes that God Himself sees him as such.

---

[1] This is covered in detail in Bp. Theophan's pamphlet *Seven Words for the Week Before Lent*, Moscow, 1902.

This is how everyone's moral life should be. How in actual fact is the greater part of it? We live carelessly. Our thoughts do not possess any conscious, independent directing of all actions, both great and small, toward pleasing God. Actions occur haphazardly; what happens is for the most part in accordance with procedures established because everyone acts in a particular way, with no thought as to the suitability of these actions to life's main purpose.

Recently I wrote you concerning the spirit of life, how it is either God-fearing, vain, or worldly. I forgot to add a fourth possibility: *Neither one thing nor the other.*[1] Don't the majority of people breathe with this spirit? They seemingly have nothing against God, but they also have no deliberate intention of pleasing God. For example, they happen to drop into church; they drop in, they leave, they make no apology. When they pray at home they make a bow or two, and that is it. They are satisfied. That is how they are in everything with respect to God. While they are not obvious egotists, when it comes to the preservation of their own interests, in order to avoid making any self-sacrifice, they can always find a reason to avoid it. They also are not too blatantly vain, but have no objection to amusing themselves with worldly matters. People of this sort are rather common. They are indifferent to the matter of pleasing God and salvation; they are neither hot nor cold. God turns away from them and rejects them.

---

[1] See Letter 26 (at the end).

You have not belonged to this category up to this point? I do not think you have entirely. However, most of the things you have done have been because that is what everyone in your group does. Abandon what you have been. I assure you that if you do everything in good conscience that has been prescribed, you will cease to resemble such people in even a small way, and you will begin to do all things well and exceedingly well. It is not that the deeds will take on a special character; however, they will take on a special coloring, a different quality, a different beauty and seemliness. Lord give the blessing! I wish this for you with all my heart. Once you have begun to act in accordance with the will of God in everything, you will certainly be filled with inner peace, and feel genuine peace; clear, warm, joyous peace, which is paradise for the soul.

To make this come about, however, it is necessary to decide on such a life. To reach the point of decisiveness, it is necessary to feel the depravity of life, the disregard for what is important—the being neither one thing nor the other—and then to feel the delightful worthiness of the attentive life. And this is little. It is necessary to be contrite, for even if the time one has lived has been short, all the same, a part of that has been lived in vain. A contrite heart concerning one's defects before God is the basis of the decision to be diligent toward Him in the future. You must attend to all of this now. May the Lord help you!

May the Lord Who arranges the salvation of all who are saved through each one's own set of circumstances also teach you how to put things aright, so that your life does not pass in vain, as neither one thing nor the other; instead, may it be God-pleasing and bring salvation to you and serve as the means for receiving the Heavenly Kingdom.

38.

A CONSCIOUS RENEWAL OF THE VOWS GIVEN AT BAPTISM

The necessary resolve of one preparing for Communion to dedicate himself to God is to be considered as a conscious renewal of the vows given for us at Baptism.

I have still more to add. After reading everything that lies ahead of you, do not think, "Oh! How terrible! How am I going to be able to do all of this?" If it were really like this, it would be impossible to get a solid grip on things because it is so critically important. But there is nothing particularly difficult or overwhelming here. Everything is simple. Begin gradually and you will be able to do everything. Even if you are not able to do everything as you would like, do what you are able to do. The Lord is not strict about minor details. He values diligence and purpose. He will accept your effort to reexamine and remake yourself entirely as a finished deed. Just do not give up the effort, but keep going until you reach the end. The most important thing, that is, the firmly resolved intention of dedicating your entire self to the Lord must be constantly kindled, strengthened, and established within you once and for all. This is an essential condition for receiving the grace which is imparted in the Mysteries of Repentance and Holy Communion.

I will remind you of how our salvation was arranged, and you will see what the most important thing is for you now. We sinned through our forefathers. Divine benevolence took pity on us and arranged our salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who became incarnate for the sake of man and for our salvation. He accomplished this salvation by His death on the Cross and Resurrection, and the sending down of the Holy Spirit. Those who believe in Him and approach Him with repentance receive remission of sins for the sake of His death, and receive the grace of the Holy Spirit in the Mysteries for the sake of deciding to follow Him and His teaching in life . All this is accomplished by Baptism and Chrismation. One who has received grace begins a new life, having been born of the Holy Spirit. We received this new birth in our childhood. Our parents and godparents attested to faith for us. They have been entrusted with seeing that we live according to the Lord's commandments. It is for this reason that in these first Mysteries everything is done for us as if we had consciously expressed faith and made our vows, but obviously on the condition that when we grow up and come to self-knowledge, we ourselves willfully take upon ourselves the obligation which was expressed for us by others during Baptism. When someone does this, then the Divine grace, which has been operating up to this point alone and in secret, begins operating with freedom and often allows the person who has made the decision to sensibly feel and manifestly help in arranging his own salvation. This occurs for the most part during the fast.

This is what you are to do, then. You have previously fasted and done everything that is usually done at that time. But now you want to do this with more discretion, with full awareness of the matter. Going by this, I make clear to you that now you are to stand up *so that you will pronounce those vows which were given for you by others.* When you were baptized, satan and all his works and all his service (worldly life) were renounced; now you yourself must renounce all of these things. When you were baptized, everything was confirmed for you, that you would unite to Christ and serve Him and worship Him; now you yourself must proclaim this with all your heart and mind.

Enter into this with conviction and understand the determination that accompanies it. May the Lord be your helper, and also the Mother of God and your Guardian Angel!

May the grace of the All-Holy Spirit overshadow you in the Mysteries of Confession and Holy Communion, which you should approach with a blessed disposition and decision.

39.

HOW THE ENEMY TRIES TO LEAD ONE ASTRAY

Amendment of life consists in the erecting anew not of the outward order but in the spirit, with readiness to war with obstacles. Various means by which the enemy tries to lead astray those who stand on the path of true life.

Your last letter was a festive occasion for me! Your head has cleared and the decisions of your heart are adopting true and saving direction!

You have begun doing everything that is necessary. Lord give the blessing! All your intentions about your future new ways of life are good. However, so that you do not become lopsided in your enthusiasm, although this would be toward the right,[1] I rush this bit of advice.

Watch when you remake everything that you pay more attention to the inward things than to the outward. The outward things can be put aside for the time being as they are, with the exception of those things which by their very nature have a harmful action on the heart, making one vain, disturbing the thoughts, filling one with unnecessary desires, and the like. **Remaking, of course, must also touch on outward ways, but not so much in the form as in the spirit in which they need to be done.** If you do this, then outwardly, everything will remain the same with a few exceptions, but the spirit will be completely different. **The advantage of not breaking off outward ways too abruptly is that your change will not be too obvious to anyone.**

---

[1] "Temptation from the right" is zeal without knowledge: over concern for correctness in externals of church life without proper attention to humility and compassion. The Lord accused the Pharisees of this saying, *Ye pay tithe of mint and anise...and have omitted the weightier matters...mercy, and faith.* Matt. 23:23.

Next, what you should have in your mind is something you already have, namely, do not think that the plan is simple to put into action. How many outer and inner obstacles there are! You are doing the right thing by preparing not to take the easy way, but to do battle. So! Get ready to struggle, and ask the Lord for everything, to grant you strength to endure everything hostile and hindering that you will encounter. Do not put your trust in yourself. Place all hope in the Lord, and His help will always be with you.

In preparing for battle, however, do not think that you will always be victorious. Often there will be only hardship that will bring nothing but affliction. You will often see that with each desire to be careful, slips and blunders steal by and creep in. Know ahead of time that this is the way things are. You will encounter them, but do not be afraid. **You are seeing all of this now beforehand; do not expect the life ahead to be anything other than one in the midst of all kinds of hostility, worries and misfortunes.**

Provide yourself with only one thing, strong courage: no matter what happens, stay with what you have begun. This alone must now be established and set for life by commitment and by steadfast perseverance. **No matter how life goes, whatever successes and failures there are, you should give all of this over to God's will.**

It is evident from the experiences noted in the Lives of Saints that the Lord leads those who adhere to Him with warm love and who devote their lives to Him toward perfection in different ways. He will even allow the enemy to act in a hostile manner, not withholding in this, however, His helpful right hand. Everything is from God. But His ways are wondrous, and importantly, they are secret. Even the one who is being led perceives them only when looking back after the fact. How important then is the continual prayer, *Save me by the way Thou knowest!* Committing yourself into God's hands with this prayer, the matter is entire and irrevocable.

The adversary will not sleep. God's saints noted that he operates on those who are just beginning in two ways. Some he does not disturb at all and does not put up any opposition. Those who do not encounter inward or outward impediments and who see that everything is going smoothly begin to fantasize that this is the way things are, and they suppose they have driven out all adversaries, who are unable to show themselves. As soon as such thoughts have settled in, **the adversary immediately enters and begins fabricating vainglorious dreams from which are born self-conceit, the falling away from God's help, and the cessation of searching and striving after this help.** The result of this is deprivation. As soon as matters have reached this point, the adversary begins operating tyrannically to stir up evil inside and strong antagonism from outside, and the poor conceited person falls. Such instances are not rare. Allow me to bring this to your attention right now while you are figuring out how to order your life so that when you begin your new life and everything is going smoothly, you do not get a high opinion of yourself, but see in this instead the devil's ambush, the most dangerous thing, and you will increase your caution and concern in this matter. **Perfection, barely perceptible, comes after much**

toil and after many years, not from the beginning and during the very first days.

On the other hand, the enemy attacks others with all his force and swiftness from the very start, and so such beginners are lost. No matter where such a person turns, everything is against him in his thoughts and senses. Outwardly it is apparent only that things are going contrary to good intentions and that nothing is favorable. The adversary does this to frighten the novice the first time and to make him give up his good intentions and return to his careless and inattentive life. As soon as he notices that the novice does not yield, but instead is holding his ground, he immediately backs off. A courageous stand against the adversary serves as a crown to the toilers, and he does not want to furnish them with such crowns. Keep in mind, then, that in case of heavy, antagonistic pressure, not to be frightened; know that this is a trap of the adversary that he will give up as soon as he detects your steadfastness.

You are doing very well not to see the path in front of you as being rosy. This is a realistic outlook on the matter. Prepare to be steadfast. However, you will be saved. There is still more to tell you, but that will be for another time.

40.

VARIOUS CAUSES OF SPIRITUAL COOLING

The danger of cooling off in the future. Various causes of cooling off in the spiritual life. How to conduct oneself during the cool periods that occur.

You are frightened. Well, you will not make it to the end until you have made a diligent beginning. Yes, it is necessary to be frightened of that, for we are often fickle and work against ourselves. Do not rely on yourself. Place all your hope in the Lord. Do not abandon this apprehension, but maintain it through the fear that you sometimes offend your beloved Lord, that if you weaken again you will not rise to such inspiration, that the present is now, and death is tomorrow. After this apprehension passes, it will be replaced by the true hope of salvation, but do not abandon it for now. It will kindle enthusiasm and drive away inclinations toward weaknesses that are very harmful. The result of this will be the persistent cry within your heart: O Lord, save me! O Lord, help! And, save me, an unworthy person, by the way Thou knowest! I always call this the anguished prostration to the Lord in the heart. The enemies are powerful, both from the inside and the outside, and you do not know how storms will arise and bewilder you. You stumble and then you fall. That is why you cry out, Lord save me! This is indeed the contrite and humble heart about which the repentant prophet David speaks, saying that his Lord does not despise or disdain him, but listens to him. Remember this. Since you have already seen this danger, it is worth giving you a little reminder: Always be aware of this danger and cry out for help. This feeling of anguished prostration before the Lord must be persistent; it comes from the awareness of surrounding dangers which are capable of halting the flow of spiritual life and stifling it. Take note of it; he who has it walks a straight path. This is the most critical sign!

You write, "If only God would grant that the present willingness for what I have undertaken not be further weakened." Not that it should not be further weakened, that it should never be weakened. Note that this willingness, or diligent work for the Lord, or zeal for God-pleasing things, or the decision to devote yourself to serving the Lord by strict observance of His commandments, are all one and the same thing; only the words are different, they are what make up the spiritual life.[1] When there is this willingness, there is spiritual life, and when there is not, there is no spiritual life. When it does not last, it is just the same as the spiritual breath ceasing and the spiritual heart no longer beating; the spirit either dies or comes to a standstill. **That is why the first concern of someone who has set out on the Divine path must be to maintain and kindle in every possible way willingness, zeal, and diligence.** It also is possible to narrow all the rules that follow to this one thing, that is, just take care of this zeal and willingness, for it will of itself teach you what to do and how to act. Note this!

This, together with the previously mentioned anguished prostration to the Lord, is the foundation of spiritual life, its protection and bulwark. You have correctly described the adversary of this fundamental disposition, and therefore the adversary of that which is most important in life, that is, *cooling* (of the spirit). What an exceedingly bitter thing! But know that **not every dying down of the fire of zeal is destructive cooling. It happens both as a result of excessive tension of the soul's strength and as a result of bodily sickness.** This is something **else; it is nothing, and will pass.** The cooling that is harmful is the result of a willful falling away from the Divine will, in full consciousness and in defiance of the conscience, in full knowledge of abandoning it, and with predilection for that which is ungodly. This kills the spirit and cuts off the spiritual life. Fear this more than anything, fear it like fire, like death. It happens as a result of losing attention toward oneself and the fear of God. Observe these things so that you avoid such devastating evil. **Concerning the unintentional, inadvertent coolings that are the result of fatigue and sickness, there is one rule: Be patient and do not violate any established and pious ways, although**

---

[1] See I Corinthians 12:4, *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.*

in carrying them out, you may be going through just the motions. The cooling will quickly depart from whoever endures this patiently, and the usual warm and sincere zeal will return. Allow me to bring to your attention and therefore institute the rule that, first of all, you should never permit your zeal to cool, and secondly, in case of unintentional cooling, you should keep persisting in your established ways with the conviction that this routine execution of things will soon bring back the liveliness and warmth of diligence.

Everything that has been prescribed for you in the last two letters will prove useful to you later on when you begin conducting your new life in this manner. But because during this reorganizing of your life's ways—even though it has all been intellectual to this point—you should still have in mind all possible situations that lie ahead, I considered that it would not be superfluous to expand on this now, especially since you brought it up.

It made me very happy that you touched on the most essential aspects of spiritual life, perhaps without noticing. This means that your mind is working correctly. The Lord, seeing your willingness to serve him with all your heart and soul, is helping you; you yourself do not know that certain suppositions and warnings fall into your mind. This is your Guardian Angel speaking to you at the Lord's command. May the Lord bless your beginning! I wish you success with all my heart.

When you begin to work on yourself, you will see that all outward direction and instructions are only guidelines. What is really needed by the soul, or how best to act in a particular instance, each soul must decide for itself with the help of God's grace which guides it invisibly. A person who sincerely wishes to please the Lord and who has completely devoted himself to Him will always end up doing the right thing, but he succeeds by humility.

I will close with this good wish: May the Lord help you to carry out your preparation for *govenie* in the most successful way.

41.

FINAL COUNSELS BEFORE CONFESSION AND COMMUNION

Final counsels before Confession and Communion.

The time for Confession has already approached, and after that the most sweet moment of Communion of Christ's Mysteries! May the Lord bless you to carry out both in a fitting way. Both the toils of *govenie* and everything conceived by you are toward this end; it is here that they are impressed with the Divine imprint.

Why, then, do you write that you are afraid to go to Confession? Many people have such a fear, but why you? Allow me to clear up the matter for you. The confessor is merely the witness, the Lord accepts the sins. It is He who commands the confessor to give absolution to the person who confesses. It is the Lord who is merciful. He is just waiting for a person to confess his sins, and as soon as he does, He immediately forgives him. What is there to fear from such a Lord?

This misgiving comes about partly because it is not clear what should be said at Confession. But when you do everything as prescribed, everything will be clear for you, and there will not be anything to fear.

The misgiving also comes about because we rarely confess. If we were to confess more often, we would not be so afraid. Maybe God will grant that from this time forth you will come

to the Lord's Supper more often, and, consequently, go to Confession more often.

Here is what you should do in the meantime. **Write down everything you find that you need to say at Confession, and when you go to the priest, tell him everything with the help of your notes. A true confession must indeed be your own; that is, the person who confesses must himself tell everything in which he has sinned without expecting the priest to ask him.** That is what Confession has become for us; it is rarely conducted as it was intended. The confessor, out of necessity, asks much that does not apply to the person who is confessing, but that which does apply, he does not ask. Thus, these things go unconfessed. **You yourself are to tell everything that is on your conscience. It is possible to remember everything without notes; just make sure that you yourself tell everything.** May the Lord bless you to confess with a spirit of contrition and with the firm conviction to be diligent in everything afterward, without any fear. Such fear is quite unnecessary, and hinders the matter.

I had to put this letter aside for a little while, and my train of thought was interrupted.

When fear comes before Confession, drive it away. Reverential fear of God is something that is very valuable, but the childish fear you have is harmful. It has nothing at all to do with the matter; it is something the adversary causes. **Go to the Lord calmly, but with a contrite heart; go as the prodigal son went to his father in the parable.** The father of the returning son did not rebuke or scold him; rather, he reached out to embrace and kiss him. The same thing is waiting for you. The arms of the Lord are already reaching out toward you. All that remains for you to do is to rush into them. Do this with reverential love.

The main thing in repentance is the anguish of the heart over being deficient in the Lord's eyes and a firm resolution

to try to be diligent in everything in the future. You have already expressed your own decision to perform God-pleasing work for the Lord, and the Lord, seeing everything, has already accepted it, of course. But do you have anguish in your heart over being incorrigible? Work a little at stirring up this anguish. No matter how few your sins are and how minor they are, all the same they are sins and come under Divine disfavor. How ashamed we are in front of other people on account of some frivolous, careless word or deed! We are not talking about doing frivolous things in front of the Lord, but sins. Learn from this to be contrite in everything and to grieve before the Lord. The result of such contrition will be a stronghold against shortcomings.

You were planning to reexamine everything in detail and make readjustments. Perhaps you have not managed to do everything or you have not done everything as completely as you planned; do not be embarrassed by this. The most important thing to the Lord is your intention and decision to be diligent in everything before Him. It is because of this that there is forgiveness of sins and the cleansing of mercy. Go to the Lord with the firm intention of being diligent, with the intention of having discernment instead of all these shortcomings, and of knowing how to be discerning. Bring to the Lord the firm intention of steadfastly carrying out everything that your conscience considers necessary for you now and whatever else it finds later on; do not be confused by additional things.

It is best to go to Confession the evening before Communion so that the night and morning will be filled with only the thought of receiving the Lord. During this period before Communion, read the homilies in the book I gave you. Sit and think about the Lord, praying thus in your heart: Lord, as Thou wilt, so put things right within me, and do not deprive me of Thy Communion. Pray with a short prayer like this, adding prostrations to it. If you put off your Confession until morning, your thought will not be focused in the evening; instead, it will turn out confused.

When going to the Holy Mysteries, go with simplicity of heart, in full faith that you will receive the Lord within yourself, and with the proper reverence toward this. What your state of mind should be after this, leave to the Lord Himself. Many desire ahead of time to receive this or that from Holy Communion, and then, not seeing what they wanted, they are troubled, and even their faith in the power of the Mystery is shaken. The fault lies not with the Mystery, but with superficial assumptions. Do not promise yourself anything. Leave everything to the Lord, asking a single mercy from Him—to strengthen you in every kind of good so that you will be acceptable to Him. The fruit of Communion most often has a taste of sweet peace in the heart; sometimes it brings enlightenment to thought and inspiration in one's devotion to the Lord; sometimes almost nothing is apparent, but afterward in one's affairs there is noted a great strength and steadfastness in the diligence one has promised. I will mention here that we do not see tangible fruits from Holy Communion because we rarely take Communion. Make it a rule for yourself that you will take Communion as often as possible, and you will see the comforting fruits of this Mystery.

I pray all the time and will continue to pray that the Lord help you to approach these two Mysteries in full renewal of your spirit. I wish your soul good in all things. May the Lord be your helper!

42.

UNCEASING REMEMBRANCE OF GOD

Greetings and best wishes to those who have repented and partaken of the Holy Mysteries of Christ. One who has begun the path of true life needs unceasing remembrance of God.

By now, most likely, you have already confessed and taken Communion.

Congratulations![1] Lord grant that this inspire your spirit, bring your heart closer to the Lord, be a privilege and joy on your life's path, and serve as moral fortification in the matter of pleasing God.

Most of all, however, I hope that you feel the joy of salvation in the Lord. For the Lord is in you, and where the Lord is, there is also salvation. A certain pagan king was caught in a storm at sea. The sailors were frightened and did not know what to do. The king, in accordance with his customary arrogance, said, "What are you afraid of? You are carrying the king." This was idle talk. Once the Lord was sailing with his disciples on the sea of Galilee. When a windstorm endangered the ship they were on, the disciples did not know what to do, and they cried out to Him, *Lord, save us, for we will perish!* First of all He rebuked the wind and the raging of the water, and when the waves had ceased and there was calm, He asked, *Where is your faith?* (Luke 8: 23-25) Thus, it is only with respect to the Lord that one can truly say, "What are you afraid of?" The Lord is with you. This I also say to you: Do not be afraid of either inner or outer turmoil, for the Lord is with you. Do not lose your living faith in this, and your heart will affirm, *Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil* (Psalm 22:4).[1] It is fitting for all who take communion to sing, *The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge* (Psalm 45: 8).[2]

---

[1] This is the customary greeting for someone who has just taken Communion in the Orthodox Church; similarly, people congratulate each other on the occasion of various feast days.

Now that you have been renewed and fortified by Divine mercy and are inspired by the Lord's presence, walk in the way of the Lord that you have adopted so diligently, and do so until the evening of your life. As an aid to you, I will remind you of a certain secret of the worthy life in the Lord, that is, of the unceasing remembrance of God. In this remembrance it is necessary to fortify oneself in every way until it does not leave the mind. God is everywhere and always with us, by us, and in us. However, we are not always with Him, for we do not remember Him and, because we do not remember, we allow ourselves to do many things that we would not allow ourselves to do if we remembered God. Take upon yourself the labor of making this remembrance habitual. Nothing special is required for this, just the intention of accepting it and exerting yourself, and remembering that the Lord is in you and close by you, and looks at you and inside of you just as intently as if someone were looking right at you. So that you do not do something, just remember that the Lord is close by and watching. Work at making this a habit and you will get used to it, and as soon as it is a habit, or is almost a habit, you will see the redeeming action that comes from it in the soul. Just do not forget that remembrance of God is not like remembrance of other things, that it must be combined with the fear of God and reverence of Him. People are very reverential from this.

---

[1] Psalm 23:4 in the King James English translation. —Translator.

[2] Psalm 46:7 in the King James English translation. —Translator.

To make it easier to acquire the habit of remembrance of God, there is a special method for fervent Christians; that is, the unceasing repetition of a short prayer of two to three words. Most common is "Lord, have mercy!" "Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner!" If you have never heard this, then listen, and if you have never done it, then begin doing it from this moment on. Whether you are walking, sitting, working, eating, going to bed, repeat over and over the words, "Lord, have mercy!" "Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner!" From long practice of this, the words will fasten themselves to the tongue so that they will repeat themselves. This has a very settling effect on the soaring and wandering of the thoughts. Again, do not forget to combine this prayer with reverence.

I already wrote you about the other things that would be helpful to you at this point when you first expressed your desire for this undertaking. Allow me to look this over. Those things that I should remind you of will be a future topic.

Be of good cheer and rejoice that you are entering on the path of genuine service to the Lord, the true path that can lead you to the inheritance of the Heavenly Kingdom. May the Lord and the Most Pure Queen help you!

43.

INNER PEACE

One who sets out on the path of true life after Repentance and Communion should instill peace within himself. Rules for dispersing inner disturbance: unceasing remembrance of God, a resolve to act according to one's conscience in every matter great or small and patient expectation of success.

I would like to add a few more instructions for you on **what you must do now as you enter your new path.**

Anyone who has undertaken a careful observation of what goes on inside himself just during the course of a single day will acknowledge as very obvious the fact that the spirit is fallen. I told you about this a very long time ago. You will recall that we have this confusion within us, that the confusion came about wrongfully, and must therefore be stopped. You yourself also wrote that you could not cope with the unrestrained inner motion. I will briefly review the description of this condition.

The mind's *thoughts* are all directed toward the earth, and there is no way to raise them to Heaven. Their object is vain, sensual, sinful. You have seen how fog drifts along the valley. This is a precise picture of our thoughts. They all crawl and drift along the earth. **In addition to this downward drifting, they constantly seethe, not standing still in a single place; they jostle each other, like a swarm of mosquitoes in the summer.** In addition, they are always in motion.

Beneath these there lies the *heart*. It is from the thoughts that blows are continually struck in the heart and corresponding actions are produced. Whatever the thought, there is a corresponding action of the heart. From this is joy, anger, envy, fear, hope, pride, despair—they arise in the heart one after the other . There is no stopping them; just as with the thoughts, there is no order whatsoever. The heart continually trembles from the *emotions* like an aspen leaf.

It does not end here. Thought with emotion always engenders *desire* that is more or less powerful. Beneath the confused thoughts and emotions are desires that are also randomly confused. One person is acquisitive, another squanders everything; one is well-wishing, another vengeful; one runs away from everyone, another goes out into the middle of the crowd; a person obeys in one thing, but in another he acts on his own; and so on and so forth. It is not that all of these things take place like this, but uncertainties—first one thing, then another—do continually swarm about in the soul. (Watch yourself, for example, when you are sitting at work; you will see all of this going on inside of yourself as if it were on a stage.)

Thus is our inner disorder and confusion. From this also comes the disorder in our lives, and the sort of gloom that lingers about us. Do not expect an orderly life until you have destroyed this inner disorder. In and of itself, it is the cause of much evil, but it is especially bad because the demons settle themselves in it and whip up things even more, directing everything for the worse and toward our destruction.

During *govenie*, when you examined yourself and set out to remove one thing or add another, then of course you could not help but turn the attention toward your inner confusion and arm yourself with the necessary zeal against it. Allow me once again to place stress on the internal enemy.

You established a firm intention to work for the Lord and belong to Him Alone from this point on. The Mystery of Repentance gave you forgiveness in everything, and you appeared pure before the face of God. Holy Communion brought you into the closest communion, or renewed your communion, with the Lord Jesus Christ, and filled you with every beneficial power. Here you are then, prepared for the job.

If only it were sufficient for the correction of our inner life to make a wish and have everything appear in the best way, or to say a word and have everything suddenly come true; then there would be no more reason for you to go to such trouble. Everything would happen for the best, and you would not have to desire it. However, such is the law of moral, free-willed life, all the more in its damaged essence, that there be steadfast perseverance. Beneficial help is available, but you still have to exert yourself and struggle, and struggle with yourself above all.

Our inner lives never get put into the proper order all of a sudden. What is always required and what lies ahead is intensified labor over oneself, over one's inner self, by the assimilation of good intention and by the enabling of grace through the Mysteries. This labor and effort is directed toward destroying the disorder that reigns inside; in its place it establishes order and harmony, after which follows inner peace and a continual joyful mood of the heart.

That is what lies ahead of you now! Do not think, however, that for this you must re-do everything, or bind yourself to a lot of rules. Absolutely not. Two or three little rules, two or three precautions, is all you need.

There is disorder within; this you know from experience. You must destroy it; this is what you want, and you have decided to do this. Begin by directly removing the cause of all this disorder. The cause of the disorder is that our spirit has lost its original foundation. Its foundation is in God. The spirit gets back to it again through *remembrance of God*. Thus, the *first thing* is this: It is necessary *to get in the habit of unceasing remembrance of God, along with fear and reverence.*

I wrote you about this last time, and you agreed to it. You know what method is required for this, and you have already begun. Lord give the blessing! And allow the continuation of this labor unhindered. **Be with the Lord, no matter what you do; and turn to Him with your whole mind, trying to conduct yourself as you would in front of a king. You will soon get in the habit, just do not give up or break off.** If you carry out this little rule conscientiously, it will reduce inner confusion and, although there will be disruptions, sometimes in the form of idle and unnecessary thoughts, or at other times in the form of emotions and inappropriate desires, you will immediately notice this error and drive out these uninvited guests, rushing each time to renew the oneness of mind concerning the One Lord.

May you be inspired! Set about this a little more enthusiastically, continue without interruption, and you will soon attain what you are seeking. **Reverential attention in the one God will be established, and inner peace will come with Him.** I say that it will be soon; however, this will take more than a day or two. These things require maybe a few months. Sometimes it takes years! Ask the Lord and He Himself will help you.

As an aid, add the following rule to this: ***Do not do anything that your conscience prohibits, and do not omit anything that it says to do, whether great or small.*** The conscience is always our moral guide. The cherished thoughts, emotions, and desires that are within us give us over to improper whims; this is caused, incidentally, by the fact that our conscience has lost its force. Restore its force, and express full obedience to it. You have now educated it by finding out all that you must and must not do. **Follow it undeviatingly, and with such perseverance that you would not allow yourself to do anything against it even if you were to die.** The more decisively you act, then, the more powerful your conscience will become. The more powerful your conscience becomes, the more completely and forcefully it will inspire you with what is necessary and steer you away from what is unnecessary in words, deeds, and thoughts, and the more quickly your inner being will be put in order. **A conscience with reverential remembrance of God is the wellspring of true spiritual life. Recall how we talked about the spirit** in the beginning of our correspondence.[1]

Nothing more is required besides these two rules. Just supplement them with *patience*. Success will not come suddenly; you must wait, toiling persistently. You must toil and, most importantly, do not give in to pleasing yourself or the world. There will be constant opposition to what you have begun. You must overcome this; therefore, you must exert more force and, consequently, be patient. Clothe yourself in this all-powerful armor and never allow your spirits to fall when you encounter misfortune. Everything will come with time. Be encouraged in your patience *through this hope*. That this is what happens is borne out by the experiences of all people who have sought and accomplished salvation.

That, then, is all! Remember God with reverence, obey your conscience, and arm yourself with hope through patience. May the Lord bless you to be so inclined and to be in this frame of mind.

---

[1] See Letters 9, 11-13.

44.

WARNINGS TO ONE ON THE TRUE PATH

Warnings to one on the true path. The exaltation of life in the springtime. The reason why many who fast are not completely corrected.

Last time I gave you two or three small rules. This time I will add two or three precautions.

1) *First of all, do not ever think that you have already succeeded in doing something.* Our weakness is that when some tiny goodness shows itself inside of us, we immediately cry out, "There, I've done it!" Drive out such thoughts. For good never comes easily and all at once as the adversary suggests. If you yield to this suggestion, your energy will immediately weaken, and then discord will be close again. So that you do not fall under this evil thought, each day, when you get up, put yourself in such a frame of mind as if you were beginning to labor on this path for the first time.

2) *Secondly, do not allow yourself to relax under any condition.* The day will come when you are toiling at self-observation and self-constraint, and the adversary will come up and mumble in your ear, "This will all happen eventually. You've been working hard, now take it easy a little bit!" This is such a tempting suggestion that it does not immediately occur to you that you should counter it, or that it is so bad that however little you give in to it, it will cause such inner disturbance. Indulging yourself is just like a tiny hole in a dam. Once a hole has formed, the dam cannot hold; the water will inevitably destroy it. Indulgence does the same thing inside of us; everything will be dispersed, so it will be necessary to start all over again to

restore ourselves. Fear this as your most evil enemy, although he speaks with the sweetest words.

There are two special occasions coming up when you must exercise special caution in this regard. Pascha and springtime are upon us.[1] We have already more or less settled into Lent. How then can we fail to make it through Pascha? By allowing ourselves to relax—some do this on Pascha, others afterward, during the spring (Paschal) season. There is the thought on Pascha that "This is a holiday, I can let myself do what I want." If a person actually gives in to this, his frame of mind will be ruined. Once he has allowed himself to do as he wants, he will not go back to self-restraint, and he will begin as previously to create carnal thoughts through the will.

Spring is a pleasant season, but how much evil is done in the moral respect! You have seen how lambs, when they are driven out into pasture, cavort, bleat and frolic about. Why is this? Life is at play. Human beings, old and young alike, also feel a similar playfulness in life. There is nothing sinful in this. It is an innocent feeling, but the way in which people use it is not entirely sinless. The joy of life! When we sense it, we should thank the Lord that on earth, which is full of grief on account of our sins, He still left a place for joy so that we would not fall into despair. Is this what happens? No, we do not thank God; instead, we set out to prolong our joy, get distracted, and return to our old ways. This joy or playfulness of life is pleasant, but it is entirely sensual and of the body, and inclinations from it likewise turn out to be sensual and bodily. We want to look at things that are pleasing to the eye, hear things that are pleasing to the ear, smell things that are pleasing to the scent, breathe air that is freshened by a pleasant breeze—in general, to increase pleasant sensual impressions. Whoever gives in to these inclinations is not able to maintain the inner life, and leaves it without fail. Then the concern over oneself ceases, and the thoughts, feelings, and desires again begin to seethe and operate in their previous disorderly way. Thought about God departs, and inner peace vanishes. The soul, tormented by the conscience, says, "Tomorrow I will not act like this;" but tomorrow there is more of the same, and likewise the day after tomorrow, and then we lose heart. We are back to the usual life. All the fruit of the great labor of putting the soul in order vanishes. This is on account of one reason, that we did not take a little precaution. We did not know how to refuse our senses in certain pleasures, and, when allowing others, we did not take care to maintain our inner self in the proper fear of God. Being attracted by outward things, then, we abandoned it (the inner self) with disregard.

---

[1] In the Orthodox Church, the Paschal season encompasses the greater part of spring, lasting for seven weeks after Easter Sunday (until Pentecost).

May the Lord protect you from this! A suspicious thought has already come to you; do not lose any ground! If you do not give any ground, God knows you will return to your steadfast intention. But you know that once you have turned back, you will be much worse off than you were when you began your new life. The Savior compares similar relapses and falls with the return of the unclean spirit to the house he abandoned; now there is no longer just one unclean spirit, but seven others. The Savior concludes His parable by saying that the last state of the man (the house) is worse than the first.[1]

Lord deliver us from this!

After reading this, do not say, "Oh, why did I begin?" Do not be upset with yourself! You made up your mind for that which is worthy, for that way of life, in which alone will you behave, as you desired at the start, on the level of true human dignity. So do not belittle your decision and do not dishonor the Lord—as if He would leave you alone. He is in you with His grace. If God be for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31) Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world (I John 4:4). Moreover, the life in which you are careful with yourself is not meant to be one that deprives you of all comfort, giving nothing in return. On the contrary, such a life, with the unceasing memory of God and obedience to one's conscience, is in and of itself a tireless source of spiritual joys, to which earthly joys may be compared like absinthe to honey.[1] You will have to deprive yourself of a few outward things. Everything must happen inwardly. It is possible to take part in everything, and yet to be apart from it. Outwardly you are doing one thing, but inwardly something else is taking place.

---

[1] See Matthew 12:43-45, and Luke 11:24-26. —Translator.

There you have it (I mean the rules and precautions prescribed in these two letters). Is it a lot? Not at all. Everything is easy to carry out and simple. But what fruit there will be! Take courage, then, and plan to conduct yourself in the future in accordance with what has been prescribed. Amen.

---

[1] Absinthe is a bitter liqueur made from wormwood and other herbs.

45.

UNDISTRACTED PRAYER

The chief occupation of one who has set out on the true path—prayer. Guidelines for undistracted prayer.

How correct is your conclusion: "Everything comes down to prayer!" Indeed it does. Prayer is a spiritual barometer for self-observation. A barometer tells how light or heavy the air is, and prayer shows how high or low our spirit has gone in its petition to God. Keep praying in the manner in which you have begun. Stand a little more often in front of your icons during the day, making prostrations both from the waist and all the way to the ground. Getting down on your knees and making prostrations is even better. No one will see this except the Lord. Morning and evening prayers take their normal course. At those times it is necessary to do a little more, just as you have been told to do. Regarding partial prostrations to the Lord, do them slightly, but not in the way we usually do when we meet an acquaintance—nod the head and that is it. Perseverance, which you are encouraging in every way possible, will teach you everything.

Do not ever forget, however, that ***the essence of prayer is the raising of the heart and mind to God,*** for God is everywhere. The holy Prophet David taught his soul, *In every place of His dominion, bless the Lord, O my soul!* [1] As I have already written, remembrance of God, or as you put it even better, love for God, more than anything else inclines us toward this. May the Lord give you a blessing in exceptional love for Him. However, even in love for the Lord there is remembrance of Him, with a deepened awareness of His Divine characteristics and activity. You must train yourself in remembrance of God, and the means for doing this, as I have written, is short prayer, in which you continually repeat the thought, Lord have mercy! Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner! You have already begun using this prayer; continue it, whether you are sitting, walking, doing some task, or talking. In every situation and at every moment, keep in mind that the Lord is close by, and call out to Him from your heart, Lord have mercy!

---

[1] Psalm 102:20; Psalm 103:22 in the King James version of the Bible. The reader is reminded that the Orthodox Church follows the Greek Septuagint version of the Psalter, which has a slightly different numbering system from the Hebrew version. The Hebrew version is what is followed by the King James and most other English translations of the Bible.—Trans.

You say that your thoughts stray. This is straight away forbidden; you must work a little harder until you have firmly established the habit of dwelling inside the heart before the Lord. It seems I have already told you that as soon as you notice your thoughts have wandered off, you must bring them back, and that you must make a deliberate and conscious effort never to let them wander. This you must do not just when you are praying, but at all times. Make this your rule: *Always be with the Lord in mind and heart; never allow the thoughts to wander, but when they do, call them back again and force them to stay at home in the house of the heart and speak with the most sweet Lord.* Once you have made this your rule, you must force yourself carry it out faithfully. You must scold yourself when you violate it, imposing some sort of penalty on yourself, and you must pray to the Lord to help you in this most necessary matter. If you persevere at this, you will soon be successful. These are the conditions for success: 1) *Uninterrupted continuity of such undertaking*—persistence in it. Do not keep starting and putting it aside over and over; rather, once you have begun, keep at it until success comes. In any case, success depends on the persistence of labor. 2) **To bring this about, you need to arm yourself with *patience and self-discipline.*** Uncertainty will come, desire will weaken, and even doubt will arise; you must drive all this away, as you set out to do, and force yourself to continue in your labors. 3) To make this happen, be inspired with the hope that the Lord, seeing your labor over prayer and the diligence with which you seek to make it habitual, will at last grant you this prayer, and that *once it has become consolidated in the heart, it will flow on its own like a fountain from it.* This most blessed fruit is the fruit of prayerful labor! The expectation of it has inspired all those who pray, and the receiving of it has been for them a source of continual spiritual bliss, joy, and a peaceful heart in God. May the Lord bestow this fruit on you! But without persistent, self-disciplined, patient, and hopeful labor, He will not bestow it. Have courage!

I am sending you a little book about this subject entitled *Letters on the Spiritual Life.*[1] It is directed toward the consolidation of the mind in the heart with attentiveness toward the Lord and prayerful disposition. For the labor of prayer, you need to select and read such books or articles that discuss everything about prayer and prayerful frames of mind.

The more you become confirmed in the remembrance of God, or in mental expression to God in the heart, the calmer you will be, and the less your thoughts will wander. The inner condition and success in prayer go together.

Remember that we have been speaking about the spirit since the very beginning of our correspondence.[2] Now we have the restoration of it to its proper place. Once it has been restored, cleansing activity begins; this is a fundamental re-working of soul, body and outward relationships. Then you will become a real person.

---

[1] St. Theophan's note: One could also add the small anthology called *The Holy Fathers on Watchfulness and Prayer.*

[2] Letters 20-21.

46.

GENERAL RULES FOR STAYING ON THE TRUE PATH

General rules for staying on the true path of life.

You have set out on the path of serving the Lord with such determination. Lord give the blessing! Serve the Lord![1] Above all, 1) fear *doubt.* It is the primary enemy. Our diligence before God, even when it is only forethought, already gives rise to the idea that we have some special quality by comparison with others and even by comparison with ourselves; this is more likely to occur when we have achieved some success along this path. When we persevere in this diligence for even a short while, it seems to be something wondrous, and we begin to day dream of ourselves as perfect beings who accomplish wonderful things. This is the enemy egging us on so as to stir up doubt. When a person yields and falls into this doubt, grace immediately deserts him and he is left all alone. Then the enemy seizes him like a helpless prey.

2) *Fear and apprehension* will not abandon you. We walk among snares. The enemy never immediately tempts with what is obviously bad; instead, he is more likely to deceive us with appearances of good. An inexperienced person will go after the bait and fall into the hands of the enemy, just as an animal walking around the woods carelessly falls into a concealed pit.

---

[1] The full quote, as used at Orthodox Vespers, is *Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice in Him with trembling,* Psalm 2:11 (same in the King James version).—Trans.

While you should be fearful, do not lose courage, for the Lord is close by.

3) May the fear of death and of the judgment at death never leave you. From morning, at the same time you are renewing the memory of the Lord in your heart, take care to add to this the memory of these *final things*. Then you will have this thought continually the entire day, just as you have the thought of the Lord; and as you are falling asleep, say, The grave is before me! Death awaits me! You will see what safeguards these are.

4) It is impossible for you to be completely removed from society. However, it is up to you as to how much time you spend in less desirable company. When you are in society, do not forget, to the extent you are able, to keep your attention on the true Lord, Who is close by and within, and do not forget the remembrance of death, which is ready to take you. Do not give your heart over to the pleasurable impressions of the eyes, ears or other senses. Life in that world is bad. Too many things, people and activities crowd into the soul; the mental impression of all this then disturbs it. It is also not conducive to proper prayer. There is one remedy for this: Guard your heart as much as possible from the pleasantness of impressions. Let everything go right past you without entering your heart.

5) Do not, however, avoid people, and do not be gloomy. This would be awkward in your situation, and you would not receive any benefit from it. However, you should spend more time with your own kind. Most likely you have good habits. Do not fall away from them so that you make yourself seem something out of the ordinary, and do not run the danger of people's gossip.

6) Spiritual studies—prayer, reading, and meditation—must be done every day without fail. What you do when is for you to decide yourself. Get up a little earlier, and before you leave the house, do your spiritual studies to the extent possible.

Spend a little more time at prayer, however. Express your vital needs to the Lord like a child and with a child's faith, using prostrations and short petitions to God to accompany the prayers from your prayer book. After prayer, read meditatively, and apply everything you read to your own situation, or think how to bring it about in your life. I have already written and repeat once again that: **it would be very fruitful if you were to briefly write down thoughts that occur to you during the Gospel and Epistle readings, or that you receive while meditating on them, every morning.** Undertake this labor and carry it out simply, without any fancy words.

7) **Labor with all your strength; bring to the Lord all your concerns about success.** Trust in God is the foundation of spiritual life. Nothing will happen all of a sudden; everything will come about in its own time. Everything you seek with faith will come. But when? When the Lord is ready to grant it. Be patient, remaining steadfast in the ways you have begun. Be inspired with the hope that the day will come when the light of joy will glow in the heart and it will be emancipated from all bonds, bringing freedom of movement and raising you to that place where the noble images of spirit ascend. Then you will soar in the realm of the spirit like a bird that has been freed from its cage.

May the blessing of the Lord be upon you! May the Mother of God grant you Her protection! May your Guardian Angel protect you from all attacks of the enemy!

47.

A PRAYER RULE

A prayer rule for one who is on the path of a God-pleasing life. Memorizing the Psalms. Replacing long prayers with short ones. The prayer rope.

You ask about a prayer rule. Yes, it is good to have a prayer rule on account of our weakness so that on the one hand we do not give in to laziness, and on the other hand we restrain our enthusiasm to its proper measure. The greatest practitioners of prayer kept a prayer rule. They would always begin with established prayers, and if during the course of these a prayer started on its own, they would put aside the others and pray that prayer. If this is what the great practitioners of prayer did, all the more reason for us to do so. Without established prayers, we would not know how to pray at all. Without them, we would be left entirely without prayer.

However, **one does not have to do many prayers. It is better to perform a small number of prayers properly than to hurry through a large number of prayers,** because it is difficult to maintain the heat of prayerful zeal when they are performed to excess.

I would consider the morning and evening prayers as set out in the prayer books to be entirely sufficient for you. Just try each time to carry them out with full attention and corresponding feelings. To be more successful at this, spend a little of your free time at reading over all the prayers separately. Think them over and feel them, so that when you recite them at your prayer rule, you will know the holy thoughts and feelings that are contained in them. **Prayer does not mean that we just**

recite prayers, but that we assimilate their content within ourselves, and pronounce them as if they came from our minds and hearts.

After you have considered and felt the prayers, work at memorizing them. Then you will not have to fumble about for your prayer book and light when it is time to pray; neither will you be distracted by anything you see while you are performing your prayers, but can more easily maintain thoughtful petition toward God. You will see for yourself what a great help this is. The fact that you will have your prayer book with you at all times and in all places is of great significance.

Being thus prepared, **when you stand at prayer be careful to keep your mind from drifting and your feeling from coldness and indifference,** exerting yourself in every way to keep your attention and to spark warmth of feeling. **After you have recited each prayer, make prostrations, as many as you like, accompanied by a prayer for any necessity that you feel, or by the usual short prayer.** This will lengthen your prayer time a little, but its power will be increased. You should pray a little longer on your own especially at the end of your prayers, asking forgiveness for unintentional straying of the mind, and placing yourself in God's hands for the entire day.

You must also maintain prayerful attention toward God throughout the day. For this, as we have already mentioned more than once, there is remembrance of God; and for remembrance of God, there are short prayers. **It is good, very good, to memorize several psalms and recite them while you are working or between tasks, doing this instead of short prayers** sometimes, with concentration. This is one of the most ancient Christian customs, mentioned by and included in the rules of St. Pachomius and St. Anthony.

After spending the day in this manner, you must pray more diligently and with more concentration in the evening.

Increase your prostrations and petitions to God, and after you have placed yourself in Divine hands once again, **go to bed with a short prayer on your lips and fall asleep with it or recite some psalm.**

Which psalms should you memorize? Memorize the ones that strike your heart as you are reading them. Each person will find different psalms to be more effective for himself. Begin with *Have mercy on me, O God* (Psalm 50);[1] then *Bless the Lord, O my soul* (Psalm 102);[2] and *Praise the Lord, O my Soul* (Psalm 145).[3] These latter two are the antiphon hymns in the Liturgy. There are also the psalms in the Canon for Divine Communion: *The Lord is my shepherd* (Psalm 22);[4] *The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof* (Psalm 23); *I believed, wherefore I spake* (Psalm 115); and the first psalm of the evening vigil, *O God, be attentive unto helping me* (Psalm 69).[5] There are the psalms of the hours, and the like. Read the Psalter and select.

After you have memorized all of these, you will always be fully armed with prayer. When some disturbing thought occurs, rush to fall down before the Lord with either a short

---

[1] Psalm 51 in the King James version. This Psalm is one of the most widely used in Orthodox worship. In addition to being part of the morning prayers that every Orthodox Christian is to recite daily, it is read at the Third Hour, at Matins, and is included in other services during the liturgical year as well.—Translator.

[2] Psalm 103 in the King James version. This Psalm is the first antiphon of Sunday Liturgy, and is also used at Vespers.—Translator.

[3] Psalm 146 in the King James version. The first six verses of this Psalm compose the second antiphon at Sunday Liturgy; it is also used in the Typica for Nativity Eve.—Translator

[4] Psalm 23 in the King James version. This and the following two Psalms, as explained by St. Theophan, are part of the Canon of the Metalepsis, or Divine Communion, which is read after Small Compline.—Translator.

[5] Psalm 24 and 116:10-19, respectively, and Psalm 70 in the King James version.—Trans.

prayer or one of the psalms, especially *O God, be attentive unto helping me*, and the disturbing cloud will immediately disperse.

There you are; everything on the subject of a prayer rule. I will, however, mention once again that you should remember that all these are aids, and the most important thing is *standing before God with the mind in the heart with devotion and heartfelt prostration to Him.*

I thought of something else to tell you! You may limit the entire prayer rule just to prostrations with short prayers and prayer in your own words. Stand and make prostrations, saying *Lord have mercy*, or some other prayer, expressing your need or giving praise and thanks to God. You should establish either a *number* of prayers, or a *time-limit* for prayer, or do both, so that you do not become lazy.

This is necessary, because there is a certain incomprehensible peculiarity about us. When, for example, we go about some outward activity, hours pass as if they were a minute. When we stand at prayer, however, hardly have a few minutes gone by, and it seems that we have been praying for an extremely long time. This thought does not cause harm when we perform prayer according to an established rule; but when somebody prays and is just making prostrations with short prayers, it presents a great temptation. This can put a halt to prayer that has barely begun, leaving the false assurance that it has been done properly. Thus, the good practitioners of prayer came up with prayer ropes so that they would not be subject to this self-deception. Prayer ropes are suggested for use by those who desire to pray using their own prayers, not prayers from a prayer book. They are used as follows: Say *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner*, and move one bead between your fingers. Repeat the prayer again and move another bead, and so on. Make a prostration during each repetition of the prayer, either a partial one from the waist or a full one to the ground, as you prefer; or, for small beads, make a prostration from the waist, and for large ones, a full one to the ground. The rule in all of this consists in having a definite number of prayer repetitions with prostrations, to which are added other prayers in your own words. When deciding on the number of prostrations and prayers, establish a time limit, so that you do not deceive yourself as to haste when you perform them. If haste creeps in, you can fill up the time by making more prostrations.

How many prostrations should be done for each prayer is set down at the end of the Psalter with sequences in two categories, one for diligent people and the other for lazy or busy people. The elders now living among us in sketes or special kellia[1] in places such as Valaam or Solovki serve the entire service according to this. If you would like to, now or some other time, you can perform your own prayer rule in this manner. Before you do this, however, get used to performing it in the manner prescribed for you. Perhaps you will not need a new rule. In any case, I am sending you a prayer rope. Try it! Note how much time you spend at morning and evening prayer, then sit down and say your short prayers with the prayer rope, and see how many times you go around the rope during the time usually required for your prayer. Let this quantity be the measure of your rule. Do this not during your usual prayer time, but at some other time, although do it with the same sort of attentiveness. The prayer rule, then, is carried out in this way, standing and making bows.

---

[1] There are three types of Orthodox monasticism: hermetic, coenobitic and skete life. Each type of monasticism follows a slightly different rule or way of life. The hermit ideally lives alone and rarely sees others, although there may be other hermits living nearby. The coenobitic life refers to monks or nuns living in close community where everything is done in common: meals, prayer rule, work, etc. Skete life is a middle way, partaking of elements of both hermetic and coenobitic life. According to St. Nilus of Sora, a skete is ideally composed of a spiritual father with no more than twelve disciples, each of whom has a separate cell, "a stone's throw apart." The term *kellion* is related to the English word "cell", but whereas the latter may properly refer to the dwelling of any monastic, *kellion* refers to an isolated cell inhabited by a hermit with perhaps one or two disciples or cell attendants. Sketes or kellia are often "under the protection" of or related to a nearby, larger coenobitic monastery. Such is the case on Mt. Athos, and, as St. Theophan mentions here, Valaam and Solovki, two of the more spiritually renowned monasteries of Northern Russia in pre-revolutionary times.

After reading this, do not think I am driving you into a monastery. I first heard about praying with a prayer rope from a lay person, not a monk. Many lay people and monastics pray in this way. It should be suitable for you, too. When you are praying with prayers that you have memorized and they do not move you, you may pray that day using the prayer rope, and do the memorized prayers another day. Thus, things will go better.

I will repeat once again that **the essence of prayer is the lifting of the mind and heart to God; these little rules are an aid. We cannot get by without them because of our weakness. May the Lord bless you!**

48.

HOW TO ATTAIN UNDISTRACTED PRAYER

How to attain essential undistracted prayer.
Preparations for the proper functioning of prayer.

You write that you cannot manage your thoughts at all, they constantly wander off, your prayer is not going as you would like it, and you scarcely think about God as you go about your daily affairs and deal with other people.

This is straight away forbidden. You must put a fair amount of labor into this so that the thoughts may be settled to even a small degree. You expected that all you had to do was begin, and everything would fall into place. It never happens that way. Even the success you began noticing should be considered as out of place. Indeed, this has happened previously, but you experienced little grief over it; now you not only notice the disorder of your thoughts, but you are disturbed by it and express the desire to cope with them, as if that were possible. Resolve to continue stirring up this anxiety, and intensify your effort in correcting this fault.

I have already written that steadfastness and continuity of labor over oneself is an essential condition for success in the spiritual life. Lasting pacification of the thoughts is a gift from God, but this gift is not given without intensifying one's personal labors. While you will not achieve anything just by your own labor, God will not give you anything if you do not labor with all your might. This is the fundamental law. You have St. Macarius the Great's *Homilies.* Try to read the nineteenth homily, which tells how the Christian must force himself in every good thing. It is written that, "It is necessary to force oneself even in prayer, if one does not have spiritual prayer," and that "In this case, God, seeing that a man is calling with effort and restraining himself (that is, his thoughts) against the will of the heart, grants him true prayer," that is, undistracted, collected, absorbed, when the mind stands continually before God. As soon as the mind begins dwelling continually with God during prayer, it does not want to leave Him afterward, for this is attended by such sweetness that once it has been tasted, it does not want to taste anything else.

I have reminded you more than once just what kind of labor must be performed here: You must not allow the thoughts to wander voluntarily, but when they stray involuntarily, you must immediately turn them back, reproaching yourself, regretting and grieving over your weakness. St. John Climacus speaks about this, saying, "It takes effort to enclose the mind in the words of the prayer."[1]

Thus, as I wrote last time, when you have memorized your prayers, things may go better. Best of all would be to go to church where the prayerful spirit is quickly manifested, because everything there is directed toward that end; but for you this is inconvenient. At least you labor at home to acquire prayer without distraction and spend as much of your other time as you can with God. When memorizing prayers, do not forget to grasp each word and feel it; then, at actual prayer time these words will engross your attention and kindle prayerful feeling.

There is something else for you to do. Do not stand at prayer immediately after household chores, conversations, or errands; instead, make some preparation for it, trying to collect your thoughts ahead of time and direct them toward standing worthily before God. Rouse within yourself the need for prayer at this particular time, because there may not be another time. Do not forget also to renew the consciousness of your spiritual needs and for the most immediate real need of all—the settling of your thoughts in prayer with the desire of finding satisfaction for them, namely in God. When there is this consciousness and the feeling for such needs in the heart, the heart itself will not allow your thoughts to wander off to something else, but will compel you to implore the Lord concerning them. Above all, you will feel more keenly your complete helplessness: without God, you are completely lost. If misfortune threatens someone, and if he is standing before a person who can save him from it with a single nod of his head, is he going to stand there looking around? No, he is going to fall on his knees before him and implore him. That is how you should be at prayer, when you go to it with a feeling of total misfortune and the consciousness that there is no one who can deliver you from it except the One God.

---

[1] Step 28.17 of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*.—Translator.

There is to be found in all of us a great little sin. It is this: We undertake almost anything else, no matter how trivial it is, with some sort of preparation, but we set about prayer on the spur of the moment, and hurry to get through it as quickly as possible, as if it were just something to do in passing, something extra, and not the most important thing of all. How then can we expect to collect our thoughts and feelings in prayer? It is done haphazardly, in a disorderly manner. No, you must resolve to refuse yourself this sin, and in no way should you allow yourself to be frivolous with regard to prayer. Persuade yourself that such an attitude toward prayer is an offense, the most serious criminal offense. Consider prayer as your first priority in life, and keep it in your heart as such. Then set about it as your primary task, not as something that is by-the-way.

Labor. God will be a help to you. But see that you do as you have been told to do. Once you begin doing this, you will soon see the fruit of it. Strive to feel the sweetness of true prayer. When you feel it, then it will entice you toward prayer and inspire you to complete and attentive prayer. May the Lord bless you!

49.

THE BURDENS OF LIFE

The burdens of life. How one should regard life's burdens so that they do not distract him but coincide with the service of God.

I shall continue addressing your complaint concerning the disorderliness of thought that is the result of life's everyday occupations.

What if there were nothing to do? There would be sinful idleness. You need to work, and to do things around the household. It is your duty. External considerations should not interfere. You must keep doing them, and do them in a fitting manner. It is the duty of human society. All work of this kind and all occupations, however, may be performed and must be performed in such a way so as not to disrupt thoughts about God. How may this be accomplished?

We have a popular belief, fairly widespread, that holds that as soon as you occupy yourself with work around the house or at your place of business, you have already left the sphere of Godly things and things pleasing to God. Thinking this, when you get the desire to live in a God-pleasing way or begin to talk about it, there is usually a thought that accompanies it that says you must run away from society, leave home, and go to the desert or the forest. This is not the case at all. Life's everyday affairs, upon which the foundation of the home and society depend, are appointed by God, and carrying them out is not a desertion to the sphere of the ungodly, but a continuation of Godly affairs.

Holding such an incorrect belief, everyone thus acts as if they do not have to be concerned with thinking about God as they go about their everyday business and social life. I see that this belief holds sway over you. You must resolve to rid yourself of it and form the conviction that everything you do around the house or outside of it, as part of everyday affairs, as a daughter, as a sister, as a Muscovite now, is both Godly and pleasing to God. There are special commandments regarding everything here. How can carrying out these commandments be displeasing to God? You are making them displeasing to God just because of your belief, because you are not carrying them out with the disposition that God desires you to have when carrying them out. You are not carrying out God's affairs in a Godly way. They are being wasted in vain, and the mind keeps driving them away from God.

Correct this, then, and from this point on **begin doing all things with the knowledge that doing them in this way is a commandment, and do them as God's commandment is to be done. Once you have set yourself to this, there is nothing that will turn your thoughts away from God; on the contrary, everything will bring them closer to Him.** All of us are servants of God. He has appointed each person a place and occupation, and He looks to see how each one of us carries it out. He is everywhere. He looks after you, too. Keep this in your thoughts and do each thing as if it were entrusted to you directly by God, no matter what it is.

Do everything around the house like this. And when someone from outside comes by to visit, or you go call on somebody yourself, keep in mind several things. **First of all, God has sent this person to you, and He is looking to see whether you receive him and relate to him in a Godly manner; secondly, God has assigned you a task outside the house and is watching to see whether you will do it in the way He wants you to.**

If you so dispose yourself, then neither household chores or work outside the house will turn your mind away from God; on the contrary, it will stay fixed on Him, with the understanding that performing any given task is pleasing to God. **You will do everything with the fear of God, and this fear will maintain unfailing attention toward God.**

You must resolve to understand thoroughly which occupations, both within the family and outside it, are pleasing to God, taking as guidance books in which suitable occupations are discussed. Understand this thoroughly, so that in your present living and social conditions you distinguish what is suitable from all the things that have been introduced here as vanity, passions, pleasing to man, pleasing to the world. Of course, because you have expressed your resolve to live a God-pleasing life, you should eliminate these things without any special reminders.

Besides the popular belief that we have discussed, there is something else associated with our occupations, which I will call *infirmity*. This infirmity is worry. That it is our duty to perform each task considered as worthy with the utmost enthusiasm is ensured by the terrible caveat that *performing Godly work in a careless manner curses it*. But worry, or the many worries that trouble the heart and give it no peace, is a disease of fallen man, who undertook to decide his own fate and who is tossed and turned on all sides. Worry disturbs our thoughts and does not even allow us to focus on the task at hand. I suggest, therefore, that you look into this, and if you find that such *worry* occasionally overwhelms you, try to drive it out and do not give it any ground. Have enthusiasm for your work and, performing it with utmost care, expect success from God, dedicating the task itself to Him, no matter how small it is, and you will get rid of worry.

Do this, and everyday occupations and tasks will not distract you from God. May the Lord help you!

50.

AROUSING IN ONESELF UNCEASING REMEMBRANCE OF GOD

Continuation. By what means one can arouse in oneself unceasing remembrance of God with love.

Another word or two to add to what has been said.

Remembrance of God is necessary. It is necessary to bring this to the point where the thought of God becomes intimately linked with and becomes one with the mind and heart and with our consciousness. It is necessary to labor over oneself tirelessly so that such memory and thought become firmly established. If you labor, God will grant, and you will achieve your end. If you do not labor, you will not achieve it. If you do not achieve it, you will come to nothing. You will have no success at all in the spiritual life; indeed, you will have no spiritual life at all, for this is the very essence of spiritual life. This is vitally important, then!

When exerting yourself to maintain the thought on God, do not treat it as ordinary thought. Instead, combine it with every concept of God that you know, Divine attributes and activities, extending the mind first in one thing and then another. Meditate more on the Divine creation and Providence; on the Incarnation of God the Word and the matter of our salvation that He perfected; on His death, Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven; the descent of the Holy Spirit; the founding of the Holy Church that is the keeper of truth and grace; and of the place prepared for all believers in the Heavenly Kingdom, including you. Meditate also on the Divine attributes, the inexpressible goodness, wisdom, omnipotence, justice, omnipresence, all-mightiness, all-knowingness, ever-blessedness, and greatness. Review all this, if you will, during prayer, or best of all, when you read. When you have done so, you will clearly comprehend that when you think about God, such thought is not ordinary; instead, it is thought that accompanies and evokes a great number of ideas on salvation that affect the heart and energize the spirit. You may make your short prayer in praise of God in which all of this is combined. An example would be: Glory to Thee, O God, worshipped in the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Glory to Thee, Creator of all things! Glory to Thee, Who created us in Thy image! Glory to Thee, Who didst not leave us in our fallen state! Glory to Thee, Lord Jesus Christ, Who came to earth, was incarnate, suffered, died for us, was resurrected, ascended into heaven, and sent down the Holy Spirit to us, and founded Thy Church for our salvation! Glory to Thee, Lord, Who by Thy wondrous way hast arranged the salvation of each person and entire peoples. Glory to Thee, Lord, Who hast brought even me to salvation.

Try to comprehend especially the last point, **bringing yourself to the awareness of the great Divine mercies toward you, and then always thank God for them.** Thank Him for letting you be born into the world, into a Christian people, to pious parents, and for the good upbringing you received. Thank Him also for placing within you the blessed decisions that you recently made, and for giving you the strength of conviction to support them. Then review your entire life from the beginning, as far back as you can remember, and take note of all the instances of unexpected deliverance from misfortune and of unexpected joy. There are many misfortunes that we are not even aware of because they pass us by without our noticing them. In looking back, however, we cannot help but note that here and there misfortune passed us by for some unexplainable reason. Observe such instances in your own life, and acknowledge that these were the grace of God, Who was showing His love for you. Know that the secret mercies that God shows to each one of us are innumerable, for everything is from God. Acknowledge these mercies, then, and thank God with all your heart. But if you examine your life well, you will find many instances when God showed His unmistakable mercy to you. Trouble was brewing, but it passed you by for some reason. God delivered you. Acknowledge these and thank God, Who loves you.

While a person's heart is warmed by the knowledge of mercies commonly shown to everyone, it is warmed all the more by the observation of the mercies manifested to that

person himself. Love ignites love. Once you have felt the Lord's love for you, you cannot remain indifferent toward Him; the heart itself is drawn toward Him with gratitude and love. Keep the heart under the influence of your conviction about the Lord's love for you, and the heartfelt warmth will soon grow into a flame of love for the Lord. When this comes about, then you will not need any reminders about remembrance of God, or any instructions on how to do it. Love will not allow you to forget your beloved Lord for a single moment. This is the ultimate goal. Resolve, if you will, to embrace it in your mind with conviction. Then you will direct all the labors that are suitable for strengthening thought about God in your mind and heart toward it.

For you to meditate on the Divine attributes and activities on your own may be a little difficult. It seems, however, that you have the writings of Bishop Tikhon. You will find his *Letters from the Cell* to be a most helpful aid.[1] Bishop Tikhon clearly contemplates each Divine attribute and activity, and writes of each one with such warmth and conviction that, if you read attentively, they will permeate your heart.

There is yet another small point that should be explained to you, but that will be for another time.

---

1. St. Tikhon of Zadonsk. *Letters from the Cell* was one of St. Tikhon's most popular works, and was reprinted numerous times and widely read in nineteenth century Russia.

51.

TURNING THE BURDENS OF LIFE TO SPIRITUAL PROFIT

How to turn the affairs and things of life to spiritual profit.

Bishop Tikhon has inspired me to provide the following helpful instruction for you, namely, how anything may be turned into an advocate of Divine truth and reminder of God.

You wrote how household occupations distract your thought from God. I indicated to you what must be done so this does not happen. You did not, however, make mention of something else that is capable of distracting, and does indeed distract, the mind from God. This is the fact that each external thing in acting on the senses, turns our attention toward itself and attempts to tear it away from God. Even here there is a certain method by which visible objects do not distract the mind, but instead attract it towards God. How can this be?

It is necessary for you to reinterpret everything that comes before your eyes in a spiritual sense. This reinterpretation must fill your mind to such an extent that when you look at something, your eyes see something sensual, but your mind contemplates a spiritual truth. For example, you see a stain on a white skirt and sense that it is unpleasant, a shame to have happen. Reinterpret this as to how unfortunate and unpleasant it must be for the Lord, angels, and saints to see the stain of sin on our souls, pure from creation in the Divine image, renewed in the font of Baptism, and cleansed in the tears of repentance. You see how small children, when left by themselves, run around making noise and raising a fuss. Reinterpret this as to how our souls make noise and raise a fuss when their attention falls away from God and the fear of God. You smell a rose or something similar, and it is pleasant to you; but when you come into contact with something that has a foul stench, you turn away and hold your nose. Reinterpret it thus: Each soul gives off a particular odor,[1] with a good soul having a pleasing one, and a passionate soul a foul one. The Divine angels and saints, and sometimes even righteous people on earth, smell this; they rejoice over a pleasant one, but grieve over a foul one.

I am telling you these only as examples, because each thing may give rise to different spiritual thoughts; for one person one thing, for another person, something else. You will find what is more pleasing for you, and you will reinterpret everything surrounding you and that you may come in contact with in addition. Begin with your own home and reinterpret everything in it: the house itself, the walls, the roofing, the foundation, the windows, oven, tables, mirrors, chairs, and so on. Then continue with the people who live there and reinterpret: your parents, children, brothers and sisters, servants, visitors, and the like. Reinterpret the everyday events of life, too: getting up in the morning, greeting each other, lunch, work, going out, returning, snack-time, entertaining, singing, day, night, sleep, and so on and so forth.

As an aid to yourself, take up Bishop Tikhon once again. He has four entire books of such reinterpretations entitled *Spiritual Treasure Gathered from the World.* Get it and read through it. After you have read it and seen how he does it, you will become skilled at doing it on your own. Or you may directly adopt his reinterpretations for yourself. If, perhaps, reading these books seems to be too lengthy an undertaking, there is an abridged version of all the reinterpretations entitled *Situation*

---

[1] The Apostle Paul says, *We are unto God a sweet savor of Christ* (II Corinthians 2:15).

and Spiritual Discourse (Volume II). Here Bishop Tikhon gives a brief reinterpretation of 176 situations. It would be worth a little trouble for you to look over these with attention; besides, they encompass everything that you will need to reinterpret. Nevertheless, as you know, just do without fail that which is suggested to you.

When you have done this, each thing will be like a holy book or an article in a holy book for you. Then each thing will lead you to thought about God, as will each occupation and deed. You will then walk in the midst of the sensual world as if it were the spiritual realm. Everything will speak to you of God and keep your attention on Him. If each time you add the fear of God and awe before His majesty to this remembrance, then what other teachers and advisors do you need?!

Of course, you need labor and effort, both mental and from the heart. Do not spare yourself. If you do, you will ruin yourself. Do not spare yourself, and you will have salvation. Abandon a certain wrongful activity that often strikes and afflicts almost everyone: That is, the fact that we spare no labor on any matter except when it comes to that of salvation. We want to think that we have only to contemplate salvation and desire it, and everything is all set. That is not how it happens in reality. The matter of salvation is the most important thing. Consequently it is the most difficult. This is by virtue of its importance and by the labor required. Labor then, for the Lord's sake! Very soon you will see the fruit. If you do not set to work, however, you will be left without anything and be unworthy. Deliver us, Lord, from this!

52.

BURNING LOVE FOR GOD

Remembrance of God must lead to a feeling of warmth or burning love for God.

You are surprised that I spend so much time explaining the very same thing. "Of course," you say, "I need many other things."

Now I have finished. You have only to carry it out. The reason I spent so long explaining everything about remembrance of God is because all the power is in this. Once you are established in this remembrance—not just barren remembrance, but with reverence and similar feelings toward the Lord—it will compel you to be diligent in everything else, too. You will be diligent in such a way that you will have a certain wondrous beauty, for there is also a crude, awkward sort of diligence. This remembrance will be for you lord, master and executor of all affairs, especially those of your inner life. That which the Apostle Paul prayed for and wished for the Ephesians, and through them for all Christians, will then be fulfilled within you: *That (God) grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith* (3:16-17). This is what I have been talking about. Saint Paul considered this so important that, when praying about it, he prayed with a special fervor: *For this, I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (3:14). How could I not talk about this with you? Once the remembrance of God has been established in the inner man, then Christ the Lord will dwell within you. The two things go together.

A certain warm feeling toward the Lord will serve as a sign to convince you that this most wonderful thing has begun to operate inside of you. If you carry out everything that has been prescribed, this feeling will soon begin to appear more and more often, until finally it is there continually. Beginning from its first appearance, this feeling sweetly and blissfully arouses the desire to seek after it, so that it will never leave the heart, for in it is Paradise.

Would you like to enter into this Paradise a little sooner? Then do this: When you pray, do not stop praying until you have aroused some sort of feeling toward God in your heart. This can be reverence, or devotion, or thanksgiving, or praise, or humility and contrition, or trust and hope. Do this also when you begin reading during your devotions; do not stop reading until you have felt the truth that you have read. If you pay attention to yourself, these two feelings (methods), by warming you up, are capable of keeping you under their influence all day. Work at carrying out these two methods precisely, and you will see for yourself what happens.

When something is out under the sun's rays for a long time, it gets very warm; the same thing will happen for you. By keeping yourself under the rays of the remembrance of God and your feelings toward Him, you will be warmed more and more with an unearthly warmth, and then you will become completely fiery, and not just fiery, but ablaze. The following will be fulfilled for you: *I am come to send fire on the earth* of human hearts, and I could not wish for more other than that it inflame everyone as soon as possible (Luke 12:49).

Apply the following comparison to this: When a spark falls on a hot object, the object begins smoldering gradually; then it catches fire until finally it is engulfed by flame, and, being dark by its essence, it becomes bright and shining on account of the fire that engulfs it. That is how it will be for you. Growing warm gradually, you will begin to glow; the spiritual flame will break out, and, once it has penetrated to all parts of you, will engulf you and make you bright, although you are in and of yourself dark. Recall here how at the beginning we said something about the sheath of the soul, and then about the radiance of the grace-filled soul.[1] That is how it will be with you and inside of you! Truly it will. Ahead of you, however, there is sweat and toil, and how long everything will take is known to God Alone, for everything is from Him. Just know that God is not offended and has not forgotten your labor of love.

53.

PASSIONS AS AN OBSTACLE TO THE SPIRIT[2]

Passions as an obstacle to the spirit that burns with love for God. They must be expelled.

Your inner remaking will begin properly from the time your heart becomes warmed with the Divine warmth. The little flame within you melts down everything and refines it; in other words, everything will begin spiritualizing until it is entirely spiritualized. Until the flame comes, there will be no spiritualization, no matter how hard you exert yourself in spiritual things. Consequently, it is a matter of acquiring that little flame now. Try to direct all your labors toward this end.

Be aware, however, that the flame will not appear as long as the passions hold sway, even if you do not indulge them. Passions are like dampness in firewood. Damp firewood does not burn. It is necessary to fetch dry logs from somewhere and kindle them. Once they start burning, they begin drying out the dampness, and, depending on how much they are able to dry the damp firewood, they set it afire. Thus the fire drives out the dampness and spreads, and all the wood is engulfed by flame.

---

[1] Letters 13-14, 27.

[2] Fr. Seraphim's note: "Whole chapter good."

Our "firewood" consists of all the faculties of our souls and all the functions of our bodies. All of these, so long as the person does not pay attention to himself, are saturated with dampness—with passions, that is, and, until these passions are driven away, they stubbornly resist the spiritual fire. Recall how when I described for you what is inside us, I wrote that there is within us a kind of chaotic, stormy region in which thoughts, desires and emotions are jumbled in confusion and scattered by the passions like dust. I situate this region between the soul and body, stipulating that the passions do not belong to our nature, but are alien to it. They do not remain inside the gap, however; instead, they pass right into both soul and body and place the spirit itself—the consciousness and free will—under their power; and in this way rule the entire person. When they work in collusion with demons, the demons rule through them over the person, who nevertheless thinks that he himself is in control.

It is the spirit that first of all escapes from these bonds. The grace of God pulls it free. The spirit, filled with the fear of God by the action of grace, breaks off any ties with the passions and, repenting for what has passed, makes a firm commitment from this point forward to please God Alone and to live for Him Alone, walking in His commandments. The spirit, standing fast in its resoluteness, then drives the passions from the soul and body with the help of Divine grace, and everything inside becomes spiritualized. Within you, too, the spirit has broken the bonds that held it. You stand on the side of God consciously and through free will. You want to belong to God and please Him. This is the foothold for your spiritual activity. But whereas your spirit has risen from its ashes, the soul and body are still under the action of the passions and endure their violence. What is left for you now is to arm yourself against the passions, thrash them, and drive them from soul and body. This combat with the passions is unavoidable. In and of themselves they will not give up their possessions, even though these were wrongfully acquired.

Before this, I explained everything to you about remembrance of God, dwelling with God and walking in His presence. You were surprised; why did I keep talking about the same thing? Remembrance of God is the life of the spirit. It ignites your zeal to please God and makes firm your resolution to belong to Him. This is, I will repeat again, the foothold for life in the spirit, and, I will add, the base for your strategic operations against the passions.

You ask, "How can this be? When I turned to God with my attention and desire, what place was there for the passions?" What are you asking? Look, are they not still inside of you? Not long ago you wrote that you were very angry. Is that not a passion? But it is not the only one; there is also pride, self-will, and haughtiness. Before this you recollected how you refused to give something you were asked for. What is this? Is that not stinginess? Again, you said you could not stand a certain person. Is that not a passion? You love to sleep; is that not the passion of pampering the body? You discovered all of these just in passing; if you were to dig deeper inside yourself, what else would you not find?

Thus, there is nothing to ask. You probably know that there are passions inside of you and that they must be driven out because their dwelling is wrong and harmful, since they are hindering further success in the spiritual life. You will arm yourself against them. Do not be bashful. It is a very simple matter; there are two or three methods, and that is all. This will be for another time, however.

54.

WARFARE WITH THE PASSIONS

Concerning warfare with the passions.

I shall continue. There are *passions* within us, but they do not have autonomy. The reason, for instance, is an essential part of the soul that is impossible to take away without destroying the soul. The passions, however, are not like this. They have entered into our nature and can be driven out without making a person something other than a human being. On the contrary, once they have been driven out, they leave a person a real human being, whereas their presence ruins a person, making him into something that is in many respects worse than an animal. When they control a human being and that person likes them, they become so intimately linked with human nature that when the person acts in accordance with them, it seems he is acting in accordance with his nature. It seems that way, because the person, once he has submitted to them, acts willingly in accordance with them and is even convinced that he cannot be otherwise; such is nature.

All of these (the passions) come from the desire to please one's self, selfishness and pride; and they are sustained by these. As soon as a person has denied himself, he is inspired with resolve to please God Alone; in this very spiritual act all the passions lose their foothold, and are outside the consciousness and will that they formerly controlled. Once they have lost their foothold, they are deprived of their former distinctive power by which the person was dragged along like a young ass on a cord behind its owner. Formerly, as soon as some passionate enticement appeared, the person immediately tried with all his strength to satisfy it, but this is no longer the case. Now when such enticements appear, instead of hurrying to gratify them as soon as possible, the person immediately rejects them and banishes them from his sight.

That is what is within you now that you have set out to work for the Lord with such fervor, without sparing yourself. It is true the passions had still not managed to grow and become entrenched within you up to this point. However, they were all there, and you acted in accordance with them without knowing that you were going against yourself, and you even praised them at times. For example, there was your righteous indignation or your self-righteous pride, although as far as righteousness goes, they are as unrighteous as anything else. They used to be there, and they controlled you at times almost without your knowing; they appear now and again, but you must not be controlled by them. I would like to say that they will not, because now, through your resoluteness, every power of theirs has been cut off. This happened the moment you decided *not to spare yourself* for God. But I do not know how this will go for you, because it is not enough just to decide to do something; you must also carry it out, and carry it out at all times, without making concessions. Self-pity is so deceitful; the passions sometimes adopt an attractive form. It would not be unusual if you were to work again for your passions as you used to, although without being fully aware of or observing this.

You see from this that, in spite of the fact that you have already made up your mind to please God alone and have sufficiently understood what God's holy and perfect will requires of you, you are faced with adhering strictly to the following rules: *See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools,* *but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil* (Ephesians 5:15-16). These evil days are an evil time, evil condition and evil situation in which we find ourselves because of the crafty passions that are within us. *Be sober, be vigilant* (I Peter 5:8). *Take heed, watch and pray* (Mark 13:33).

What must you watch and heed? Watch carefully that some passion does not sneak up, and be careful that it does not deceive you and compel you to do something, whether great or small, to please it. Even if you unwittingly come under the influence of a passion and it causes you to do something unintentionally, it is still a bad deed, performed to please the enemy, not God. You have got to dispose yourself so that the enemy does not derive even the slightest benefit from you. For this you must watch, be vigilant, sober, and take heed.

All these actions mean one thing: Watch that the enemy does not sneak up on you. To watch and be vigilant means not to sleep, not to give yourself over to negligence, but instead to keep the soul and body in a state of alertness. To be sober means not to put your heart in anything else except God. Such attachments make the soul drunk, and it starts not to know what it is doing. To take heed means to watch carefully, so that nothing bad appears in the heart. When you look carefully at what is going on inside you, all the while maintaining your faculties on alert and not allowing the heart to form attachments to anything, then you will carry out in true form what the Lord and St. Paul were talking about above: You will be standing at watch.

This is the first thing in the struggle with the passions. Once you have overlooked the enemy and let him through, expect either to be wounded or utterly defeated. The same enemy who has been observed is not frightful. Just threaten him and he will run off. It is a stratagem of our spiritual foes to run away immediately as soon as they have been clearly sighted, although this does not always happen, of course. There are also mischievous spirits that keep slipping in no matter what.

We still have to conclude our discussion on all of this. For now, be saved!

55.

MORE ABOUT WARFARE WITH THE PASSIONS

Continuation about warfare with the passions.

Let us suppose that you maintain vigilance over your heart. Would you discern?

I would say first of all that you are capable of doing so. When it is dark, you would not notice a large object, but when it is light, even a small object gets your attention. So long as the soul does not turn to God, it is dark inside; it lives to please itself. When it turns to God, then light enters into it, and thought about God, like a little sun, lights up everything inside. He who lives to please himself has nothing to say. See that some passion does not creep in, because self-indulgence is the den of all passions; it receives them, gives shelter to them and justifies them, and they are welcome to do as they please without opposition. On the other hand, a person who has turned to God, who denies himself and who has set out to please God, can see for himself what is displeasing to God and immediately observes something that does. Everything of the passions is displeasing to God, because the passions are all contrary to God's commandments, which alone are pleasing to God, for they express His will. You, too, set out to please God without self-pity, and by this you drove out the soul's darkness and received illumination in your spirit. If you carry out what I wrote you concerning remembrance of God, then the spiritual sun will shine within you. You are quite capable of detecting whether something of the passions has approached you.

Second of all, I would say that you have prepared for this. When you examined yourself before Confession and determined the proper way to act in the future, at the same time you also set down what should be avoided. The realm of the passions, which is always inimical to what you should do, should indeed be avoided. One should be humble, but passion teaches pride and conceit; one should be meek, but passion incites irritation and anger; one should rejoice at another's good fortune, but passion stirs up envy; one must forgive wrongdoing, but passion provokes vengeance. Thus, passionate feeling and action is contrary to everything that is just. You determined all this for yourself, and confirmed it through your resolve and vowed to do only what is proper, while you renounced the improper, that is, the passionate. I would say that by this in and of itself, you are ready to maintain vigilance not only over yourself, but also to discern, that is, to detect any passion that steals up.

The only reason why vigilance over yourself would fail is that passion does not always approach in its obvious form, but often appears to be so comely that you think it is something good, not guessing it is a passion. When anger erupts, for example, it is evident to everyone that this is a passion. However, anger is not always in its obvious form; it often appears as righteous indignation. Every passion has a similar habit of dressing itself up and posing as something comely. You are virtuous and may fall for this bait quite easily. Watch out! One must renounce all that is passionate in its most insignificant forms and subtlest features. Observe, accordingly, and do not allow anything inside.

How is one to be, then? After all, passion can steal in under cover of such comeliness! First of all, if you have turned to God with all your heart and have given yourself entirely over to Him, then He will never leave you without proper insight. His angel, your guardian, will always place a warning thought in your mind. Listen when the voice within you reveals something improper. Secondly, when you begin the struggle with the passions, and you have already done so, there will begin within you—or already has—the formation of spiritual experience, the ability to immediately distinguish right from wrong. Just decide not to allow anything that you recognize as being of the passions, no matter how trivial or insignificant it appears. If you act this way without pity, then your spiritual experience will grow. St. Paul mentions in one place those *who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil* (Hebrews 5:14). This is what is forming inside you. Just as the taste distinguishes delicacies, so will the heart, taught by its sense, tell what is good and what is bad.

You are going to say that even though you train yourself, the passions will still keep stealing in. It is true that this happens, and that it will also happen to you. The fact is, however, that you already do not permit any passion in its obvious form. Hold to this firmly. If something of the passions should steal in like a thief, God will not make you answer for it. He calls you to account only for things of the passions that you allow consciously, but He does not punish you for those things that slip by inadvertently. When some passionate thing is inadvertently allowed and subsequently recognized as being wrong, it should be cleansed through repentance before the Lord. At the same time, you should consider how it slipped in, and adopt measures for the future. You will learn how to manage the passions and everything passionate by this.

However, there is one method whereby, if you maintain your attention fully focused, the passionate rarely steals in unobserved. It is this: Consider where your thoughts and feelings are inclined—whether to pleasing God or to self-indulgence. It is not at all difficult to do this. Just pay attention to yourself. You know it is not a mistake if you do something in opposition to self-indulgence. A certain starets told his disciple, "See that you do not keep that traitor." The disciple asked, "What traitor?" The starets answered, "Self-indulgence." That is it precisely. Self-indulgence is to blame for all troubles. If you examine it, you will see that every bad thing that is allowed comes from this. Consequently, if you go counter to it with steadfast resoluteness, you will probably not allow anything that you should not. I wish this for you with all my heart: Do not keep this evil traitor.

From everything said, I conclude that you will guard yourself with ease as long as you do not get lazy or stop being attentive, and do not weaken the zeal you adopted. Remember your own phrase—to maintain yourself on the level of human dignity. Lord give the blessing!

56.

THE SLIGHTEST MOVEMENTS OF THE PASSIONS

One must expel even the slightest movements of the passions. Permissible wrath.

I want to praise you...or no, I want to present the advantages of your situation with respect to the passions.

You have lived little and the passions have not yet managed to become deeply entrenched. Although all the passions are within you, they are still like small children: weak, and really just tiresome. This is of great advantage to you, because it will be sufficient for you in many instances merely to observe a passion in order to turn away from it or drive it out. This is not the case for those who have lived for a long time and who have indulged their passions to a great extent. There the passions roar like lions and violently attack the person who has rebelled against them. But here there is a great disadvantage for you; that is, because of the frivolity of passionate thoughts, feelings and actions, you may regard them with indifference, thinking, "This is no great thing; it will pass of its own accord, one cannot chase down every little thing!" This thought, which is so natural to you, is dangerous. To act in this way means leaving the passionate feelings and actions at liberty to grow and become firmly established. They become firmly established, and from small things they become large. Then they can no longer be turned away by casting a single unfavorable glance.

You should come to the conclusion from this that, no matter how small or weak a passion appears, it is necessary to regard it as if it were the largest and most powerful. When you drink water, you drink it down to the tiniest drop; when you get a splinter in your finger, even if the splinter is so minute it is hardly visible, you rush to rid yourself of the discomfort it is causing; when the smallest speck of dust gets in your eye and irritates it, you undertake great labors to ensure that it is removed from your eye as quickly as possible. Thus, make it your rule to act the same way with respect to the passions: No matter how small the passions appear in form, rush to drive them out, and do it so ruthlessly that no trace remains of them.

How can you drive them out? Through inducing wrath that is hostile to them, or by getting angry at them. As soon as you observe a passion, try to stir up anger within yourself against it as quickly as possible. This anger is a firm rejection of the passion. The passionate cannot be sustained unless there is sympathy for it, but any sympathy is destroyed by anger, and the passionate will leave or fall away at the first manifestation of it. Here is the only case where anger is permissible and useful. I find in all the Holy Fathers that anger at something was permissible, so they could arm themselves against passionate and sinful movements of the heart and banish them through it. They associate this with the words of the prophet David, *Be angry, and sin not* (Psalm 4:5); this is later repeated by St. Paul in Ephesians 4:26.[1] Be angry at passion and you will not sin, because passion is banished by anger; every occasion for sin is cut off by this.

Arm yourself against the passions in this way. Anger against the passions should have taken root inside you from the very moment you decided to labor for the Lord with all your heart and do good things in His sight. You entered into an alliance with God forever. The essence of this alliance is: Your friends are my friends, Your enemies are my enemies. What are the passions to God? Enemies. The complete Divine disfavor toward them is proclaimed throughout all of God's Word. God resists the proud,[2] covetousness is idolatry,[3]God has scattered the bones of the man-pleasers,[4] and so on. That is why the Apostle gave Christians this instruction about the passions: *Let it not be once named among you* (Ephesians 5:3). Thus it follows that you should kindle anger against the passions inside of you as soon as they show themselves. By reason of our fall, however, it is not always that way. That is why anger at the passions requires especially unrestrained and antagonistic action, effort and exertion that is directed specifically at them.

To be successful in this, it is incumbent upon you to hurry to recognize and acknowledge your enemy and God's as soon as you have observed something passionate within yourself. Why is it necessary to hurry? Because sympathy toward the passionate is always aroused from the first moment of its

---

1. Psalm 4:4 in the King James version, which reads *Stand in awe and sin not*. Ephesians 4:26 reads *Be ye angry and sin not* (K JV).
2. See James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5.
3. See Colossians 3:5.
4. See Psalm 52:7 (Septuagint version); 53:5 in the KJV.

appearance. Self-indulgence still lives concealed within us even long after we have obviously renounced ourselves and devoted ourselves to God, even though we do not want to violate this decision by one iota. The passionate is always favorably encountered through this hidden self-indulgence or selfishness; such favor is expressed by greater or lesser sympathy toward the passionate. Thus, it is necessary to reject this sympathy and stir up anger. Both of these are encouraged by and made possible through recognition and acknowledgement of the enemy in its appearance in passionate thought or action, no matter how gratifying these are. As soon as you realize a passion's belligerence, get angry at it in a very obvious way. This anger will arise of itself.

It does not require great intellectual labor to recognize the enemy in the passionate. It is sufficient to renew your belief that God does not favorably regard anything of the passions; that is why He does not favorably regard any who accept and cherish the passionate within themselves. You know the passionate sets God against us, and it separates us from Him. This is our final destruction. The thoughts and beliefs of someone who is attentive begin shining in the consciousness in the twinkling of an eye, and are immediately echoed in the heart as antagonism, anger and wrath toward the passionate. However, do not struggle with the passionate, devising various points of indictment against it. Success against it is very doubtful. At the same time you are sorting out your points of indictment, the accused—the passion—sits there as if in the dock, and is still defended by its lawyer—sympathy. This means you are keeping impurity within yourself willfully, which is dangerous. You cannot do this. Decide without any deliberation that as soon as you observe something passionate within yourself, you will recognize the enemy—and get angry at it.

57.

STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PASSIONS

Various stages in the development of passions: passionate thoughts, feelings and movements. The battle with them.

That the passionate shows itself within us is not an inescapable misfortune. It signifies that we are impure, but it does not make us guilty. Our guilt begins from the point when we favorably incline ourselves toward a passion that has been observed; that is, we do not rush to acknowledge the enemy and do not arm ourselves against it with anger. On the contrary, we accept it and begin liking it, delighting in the impulse in which it appeared. This already shows that we have no objection to being familiar with the passionate, and, subsequently, enemies of God. *Because the carnal mind*—the passionate—*is enmity against God* (Romans 8:7).

Where assent begins, there also begins guilt, which increases by measure of its involvement in the passionate. I will describe for you how all of this happens. Our usual state is this: The thoughts wander about every which way; the emotions and desires, although they go back and forth, are without definite direction. This is how it is most of the time. Sometimes entire days pass like this. These thoughts are for the most part vain, being attached to routine everyday affairs and tasks at hand. Among these empty thoughts or daydreams about nothing often erupt. Both empty and vain thoughts throng, for the most part, on the surface of the soul. You have been told more than once how to subdue and regulate this disarray of thoughts that impedes remembrance of God and Godly things.

But look here, some object with a certain peculiar form has come among the others and demands attention. Note this point specifically: It has come and demands attention. Never let it pass without attention. Conduct an interrogation at once: Who is this, where is it from and what does it want? You yourself will find the answers to these immediately, after a mere glance at this object that has presented itself. Let us suppose that it is a person who has offended you at some time. It is obvious that by engaging your attention with this person and the association you have with him, someone desires to create within you indignation, anger and even the desire for revenge. This is what will happen if you do not adopt the necessary measures. What measures should you adopt so as to drive away this idea? It wants to bring you to a bad state. Consequently, it is your enemy. You will treat it, then, in a hostile manner, that is, not with respect, but in the way which we spoke about last time, namely, with scornful rejection.

If you do this, you will completely thwart the enemy's ruse or trap. If, however, you focus your attention on the person who has come to your imagination, then this idea, though ordinary and isolated at first, will become surrounded by a number of other thoughts and images that will paint a very vivid picture in your imagination as to how that person offended you, with all the details of the incident. Along with this, the previous feeling of offense, indignation and anger will arise in the heart. The passionate object or thought about it engendered the passionate feeling. The passionate became more entrenched. If you come to your senses and acknowledge that it is bad to allow yourself to be roused by passion, then, of course, you will see the enemy in this and treat it with hostility, after having expelled the wicked feeling from your heart and driven the very object that engendered it from your thoughts. The confusion will pass and peace of mind will be restored.

If you do not do this, however, then other passionate feelings will gather around the one that has already arisen and exacerbate it. These feelings will begin rationalizing to you, "How dare he do that? Who does he think he is, someone important? I am no worse than he is. It is impossible to ignore this. I do not know how I let it slip by me. If I were to allow everyone to treat me like that, I could not live. I will certainly have to prove to him that he cannot act like that and get away with it." Your desire for revenge, whether that vengeance is great or small, it is all the same, is at the ready. The passionate become even more deeply entrenched within. This is already the third stage. If you come to your senses at this point, you can drive off the desire. For the desire does not yet signify resolution. It arrived one moment, and it can leave the next. If you take proper action, it will be for the better; if you do not, then your torment will continue further.

Observe how the thought engendered the feeling, and the thought with the feeling engendered the desire. The mind is filled with passion. All this, however, is still mental impurity and sinfulness. It is still a long way to the act. Between the desire and the act there is always the resolution to act, and premeditation as to how to carry it out. How the resolution takes shape is not always apparent. It is already within the desire in a weak form; it then grows along with premeditation of the act, that is, with the selection of the means and establishment of methods and circumstances. When everything has been premeditated, the resolution is complete. Then the act has already been accomplished within. The sin has already been committed in front of God and the conscience; the commandments have been disregarded, the conscience violated. Sometimes a lot of time passes between the desire and the resolution with the premeditation of the act. The fear of God takes hold, the commandments are remembered and the conscience is not silent. But all of their saving suggestions are rebuffed by disregard. That is why there is already transgression and sin in the resolution. The thought, feeling and desire, although they have already occupied the entire soul, seemingly take place on the surface of the soul. There is still no strong inclination toward sin, only an urge. Strong inclination begins from the point when the soul begins deliberating whether it should satisfy the passion and how to do so. Here the soul has already set out on the path of sin.

While the resolution is forming, freedom is checked, the soul feels as if it were absolutely obligated to do what it intended. But there is no such obligation. It is a sort of inner self-delusion that is taking place. What has been decided may remain unfulfilled because of some obstacle that is suddenly encountered. Perhaps it is abandoned because the person himself has second thoughts about carrying it out, because of some consideration or because of the conscience and fear of God, if they should happen to rise up in full force.

At last, everything has been arranged and the deed done. You got your revenge as planned. The passion has been satisfied, the sin finally committed. What more could be added to the resolution that developed at first? Seemingly nothing, for here the premeditated plan has only been carried out. That is how it seems; but, in the essence of the act, the wrongdoing increases up to the last step. *First.* Up to this point, the fear of God and the conscience were merely dismissed and disregarded, now they are violated. Up to now, the situation has been like a mother who is trying to persuade her son not to do something wrong, and he brushes her aside or runs away from her. Now the son answers his mother's pleas by hitting her or slapping her in the face. *Second.* Now inner activity has been introduced into the course of outward events and is bound to be accompanied by the consequences, which are also outward and worldly. You will not cross it out of the circle of events by a stroke of the pen or verbal denial. It will remain there forever and will always be attached to the person who did it, forcing him to taste its fruits. *Third.* The Divine grace deserts him, and the person leaves the realm of God and enters into the realm of the enemy of God. He droops down, is burdened and feels himself crushed under a kind of weight. The parable about the unclean spirit returning with seven more is fulfilled in him.[1] Gloom, uneasiness, burden—this is the reward of any satisfied passion. Amazing! Until the passion is satisfied by the act, the person expects Paradise from its satisfaction: *For you shall be as gods.*[2] As soon as the passion is satisfied, however, the delusion falls from his eyes, the phantom dissipates, and there is left only emptiness, anguish, upset and burden; the person sees that he is impertinent. He took revenge on his enemy; he expected to be rejoicing, but things have turned out quite differently.

You see what the path is of tormenting yourself with some passion and falling into sin on account of it. Now we shall turn to you. What is possible in you from all that has been said? If your resolution to work for the Lord is sincere; if, having made this decision, you follow the advice given to remember God at all times with fear and reverence; if you watch after yourself strictly; then any inclination within you toward the satisfaction of passionate desire, and all that follows it, will be impossible. However, thoughts, feelings and desires are possible. These are the objects of your inner struggle.

Passionate thought, feeling and desire sometimes pass through the soul in a single instant before we know what has happened. In this case they do not make us guilty, if as soon as we recover our senses at the appearance of what is by now desire, we banish them through hostile anger toward them. Our guilt in the intention, feeling and desire is dependent on our procras-

---

1. Matthew 12:43-45.
2. Genesis 3:5.

tination; that is, after observing them we have failed to drive them away, and we dwell on them instead. Drive away the thought, and there will be no feeling or sympathy. Drive away the feeling with the intention, and there will be no desire. Drive away the desire, and there will be no danger of inclination toward the passionate. If, after observing a passionate intention, you dwell on it with attention voluntarily, you are guilty. Why did you occupy yourself with something that you know is God's enemy and yours? If, however, your attention is involuntarily attracted to the intention, you are not guilty, as long as you immediately turn your attention away from it and drive it out. If, as a result of your willful attention toward a passionate intention, a passionate feeling is engendered, then your guilt is increased a little. But if after detecting the birth of a passionate feeling, you continue to be occupied with the passionate intention, and, consequently, voluntarily provoke the feeling, then your guilt increases to twice what it was previously. If, after detecting a passionate feeling, you rouse yourself and drive it out along with the intention, then you would be guilty only in the fact that you voluntarily occupied yourself with a passionate thought; you are not guilty of the feeling, because such feelings are created through the action of the thoughts. If through the action of the passionate thought and feeling that have been voluntarily allowed, there is born within you the desire for a passionate action (for example, revenge), then your guilt is increased a little, because desire is created involuntarily from thought and feeling. Your previous guilt remains; why were you occupied with the passionate object, and when a passionate feeling was born from this, why did you allow the feeling to persist and the thought that gave rise to it? Therefore, your guilt is twofold. But if after detecting the passionate desire, you allow it to linger inside you, and do not immediately arm yourself against it, then your guilt increases by one more step; it will be threefold.

I will not go further, because I suppose this is sufficient to warn you.

You see for yourself that if you immediately drive away the passionate thought, then you put an end to the entire struggle. There will be neither feeling, and even more, there will be no desire. Make the decision to act in this way. Why would you draw on yourself the unnecessary labor of struggle, and sometimes even danger, when you have already decided not to allow the passionate as being ungodly? If the feeling begins to stir involuntarily along with the thought, immediately chase out the feeling with the thought. If desire involuntarily clings to them, immediately chase out the desire along with them. The moment you discover a passionate impulse within yourself, chase it out. Make this your rule: Do not voluntarily praise either passionate thought, feeling or desire, and immediately chase them away with complete hatred as soon as you detect them. You will always be innocent before God and before your own conscience. There will be within you the impurity of the passions, but also innocence. You will carry out the act of purification (cleansing), laboring diligently at the purifying of your soul.

May the Lord bless you!

58.

PRAYER IN THE WARFARE WITH PASSIONATE THOUGHTS

The significance of prayer in the matter of the warfare with passionate thoughts. Examples.

Last time I described for you the entire process of how one goes from the simple thought to the passionate desire, and from there to the act. However, the course of action is not always as drawn out as depicted on paper. Frequently, if not most of the time, all the stages go by very quickly, and no sooner does the thought appear than the act takes place, especially the spoken word. There is no need whatsoever to sort out and distinguish all these accidental occurrences. This will not give you any help in the struggle with the passions. Keep to one thing: When the passionate is detected, immediately arm yourself against it with wrath and hostile anger. This anger in spiritual warfare has the very same significance as when an evil person is assaulting you; you have to strike back at him hard. But just as striking back at an evil person during an assault does not always result in his running away, so too in spiritual warfare, the anger at the passionate thought, feeling, and desire does not always drive them from the soul and end the struggle with them. In the natural order of things, it would seem that this is how it should be, and it happens, but not always. This is because the demons often participate in the agitation of thought, and they are shameless. No matter how angry you get at them, they are all there. It is obvious that besides anger, it is necessary to resort to something else. What could that be?

What does the victim of an assault by an evil person do? After striking the person, he calls for help. The watchmen answer his call and save him from trouble. This is also what must be done in spiritual warfare with the passions. Once you have become angry at the passion, you have to call out for help: *Lord, help me! Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, save me! O Lord, be attentive unto my help, make haste to help me!*[1] When appealing to the Lord in this manner, do not fall away from Him through attention toward what is going on inside of you, but keep standing before the Lord, imploring Him for help. Run at once from this enemy as from a blazing fire. One of the saints said, "Destroy the enemy in the name of the Lord Jesus." No one can resist the Lord, for He is close by: *The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of them that fear Him: He also will hear their prayer, and will save them.*[2] He Himself gave such a promise to those who call upon Him in hope in their hour of need: *Because he hath set his hope upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him.*[3] Do not forget to do this, and you will always successfully engage and drive out all passions that arise within you.

There is something others have done, and perhaps do even now. That is, once they have detected the passionate and become filled with indignation toward it, they begin exposing its obscenity. For example, if the thought of pride has occurred, they begin reciting, "Pride is contrary to God; you who are earth and ash, are you not ashamed to become puffed up with this thought; remember your sins," and the like. They select thoughts against pride, supposing that by this they will drive out the prideful thought. Sometimes they drive it out, but this method is for the most part unreliable. By exposing the passionate thought, we are still keeping it in our mind, and in the meantime it stirs up feeling and arouses desire; that is, it continues to defile our soul. Whenever we appeal directly to the Lord with fear, reverence, hope and faith in His complete activity without entering into a verbal battle with the passionate, the passionate then moves away from the mind's eye, which is fixed on the Lord. When it is cut off from the mind through such attention, the passionate departs of its own accord, if it has been naturally stimulated. If the enemy is involved, however, then a discerning ray of light that comes from contemplation of the Lord strikes him. It happens that the mind immediately calms down from passionate violations as soon as it turns to the Lord and calls on Him.

---

[1] Psalm 37:22 (38:22 in the KJV).

[2] Psalm 144:18-19 (Psalm 145:18-19 in the KJV).

[3] Psalm 90:14-15 in the KJV; the first line of verse 14 reads *Because he hath set his love upon me.*

To make this clearer to you, I will tell you a legend. An elder lived in the desert of silence. The demons visibly attacked him, and began dragging him out of his cell so as to completely drive him out of the desert. The elder himself began fighting back at them, but they moved him and had already dragged him right up to the very door. Just a bit more, and they would have turned him out. Seeing his extreme danger, the elder called out, "Lord Jesus Christ! Why have you abandoned me? Help me, Lord!" As soon as he called out, the Lord appeared immediately and chased away the demons, and said to the elder, "I did not abandon you, but because you did not call on me and thought you could cope with the demons yourself, I did not come to your help. Call on Me, and you will always receive ready help." After saying this, the Lord disappeared. This incident is a lesson not just to the elder, but to all of us: Do not struggle with passionate thoughts through your own spiritual altercations with them, but turn immediately to the Lord with prayer against them.

All who prudently conduct spiritual warfare with the passions act in this way. John the Dwarf said of himself, “I act as a man sitting under a tree who looks attentively around him. This man, as soon as he sees wild beasts coming toward him to eat him, immediately climbs up the tree, and the beasts, after coming up to the tree, walk around it for awhile and go away. And I, as soon as I observe mental beasts coming toward me in passionate thoughts, immediately rise up in my mind to the Lord, and the beasts cannot get to me as they are forced to scatter every which way.”[1]

You will recall that I wrote you previously about the necessity for strengthening oneself through the attention of the mind in the heart, and there incessantly rising up and calling to the Lord. This is the same thing we are talking about now; that is, one must appeal to the Lord with prayer when passionate thoughts, feelings or desires arise. One must appeal to the Lord, going down with the attention of the mind into the heart and calling out to Him from there. If we were to carry out the following little rule unfailingly, that is, after strengthening ourselves through the mind in the heart and then standing before the Lord with fear, reverence and faith, then not only would passionate desires and feelings never arise within us, but neither would idle thoughts. It is our misfortune, however, that we mentally fall away from the Lord out of the heart and wander with our thoughts into a far country. It is at this time that the passionate thoughts invade, and before you know it, the passionate feelings have already commenced, and likewise the desires have begun to stir. You are in for a struggle! And who is to blame?! If you did not allow the thoughts to wander, there would be no battle. Let us recall, however, that, after moving away from God in our heart and having thus brought disaster upon ourselves, at least now, once the misfortune has been detected, we should rush to seek shelter once again in the heart before the Lord, so that we may call out to Him for help.

---

[1] This story may be found in *The Sayings of the Holy Fathers*, Book II, *Questions and Answers on the Rule of Life*, no. 211, vol. II of *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers*, trans. by E.A. Wallis Budge (Seattle: St. Nectarios Press, 1984), p.199.

This same John the Dwarf told the following parable on this subject: "There was in a certain place a beautiful woman of questionable behavior. The ruler of this country took pity on her, that such beauty would perish, and, when he found the opportunity, he said to her, 'Give up your immoral ways, and I will take you to my house and you will become my wife and the mistress of many treasures. Just watch that you are faithful, or else there will be such trouble for you as you cannot even imagine.' She agreed to this, and was taken to the ruler's house. Her former friends, seeing that she had disappeared, began searching for her, and found out that she was with the ruler. Although the ruler was a terror, they did not despair of enticing the beautiful woman back to themselves once again, knowing her weakness. 'We have only to go up behind the house and whistle; she will know who it is and immediately run out to us.' That is just what they did. They went up behind the house and whistled. The beautiful woman, hearing the whistle, started. Something from her previous life stirred inside of her. But she had already come to her senses, and instead of running out of the house, she rushed into the inner chambers to the ruler himself, and immediately calmed down; she did not even hear the whistling that continued outside. Her friends whistled a few more times, and went off with nothing. The meaning of the parable is clear. The beautiful woman represents the fallen soul that has turned to the Lord in repentance and made a contract to belong to and serve Him Alone. The former friends are the passions. Their whistling is the impulse of passionate thoughts, feelings and desires. Escape into the inner chambers is shelter in the depths of the heart, there to stand before the Lord. When this is accomplished within, the passion that has troubled the soul leaves of its own accord as if it had never existed, and the soul calms down."[1]

Resolve to learn this story by heart and always act according to its meaning. You will see how quickly inner peace that has been disturbed by the appearance of the passions is restored within you.

May the grace of God be with you! Be saved!

59.

ST. HESYCHIUS ON WARFARE WITH THE PASSIONS

Citation from St. Hesychius on warfare with the passions.

You have been told almost everything about spiritual warfare now. There are many passions; but no matter how many there are, all make their approach in the manner shown, and all are driven out and overcome as we have said. Each passion, of course, has its own peculiarities that accompany it when it is aroused; there are also a very great number of contingencies in the mode of their appearance. This, however, does not change the general methods for combating them. Do as you have been told, and you will successfully drive out every passion, no matter how forcefully it has arisen within you.

So that you may better remember all this and be persuaded that you must act in no other way, I am providing an excerpt from St. Hesychius the Priest of Jerusalem, whose book, you will recall, I sent to you.

---

[1] This story may be found in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. by Benedicta Ward, SLG (Oxford: Mowbray & Co. Ltd., 1981), pp.88-89.

This is what he says: "One who is engaged in the spiritual struggle must have at every moment the following four things: humility, extreme attentiveness, refutation (of the thoughts) and prayer. Humility, in so far as its adversaries in combat are the demons of pride, so that he will have at hand Christ's help in his heart, for 'the Lord resists the proud.'[1] Attentiveness, so that one does not allow the heart to have any thought, no matter how good it seems. Denial, so that as soon as one has detected a thought that has come, he may repulse it immediately with anger. Prayer, so that after refuting a thought, one may immediately cry out to Christ with 'groanings which cannot be uttered.'[2] Then this ascetic will see the enemy bound or chased by the honorable name of Jesus, like dust by the wind, or like smoke that vanishes with its dreams." (section 20)

Here is a similar passage: "It is necessary to act the same way in spiritual warfare as one acts in (conventional) war. First of all, attentiveness is required. Secondly, when we notice that the enemy has advanced a thought, it is necessary to strike it with a curse, with anger in the heart. Thirdly, one must pray against it, calling Jesus Christ into the heart so that the demonic apparition will vanish and the mind will not go off daydreaming, like a child fascinated with some adept or conjurer. (section 105)

"If in your heart you always appeal with humble wisdom, remembrance of death, self-reproach, refutation of thoughts and invocation of the name of Jesus Christ, and if you continue soberly with these weapons every day along the narrow, joy-giving, and pleasant spiritual path, then you will enter into the holy contemplation of the saints, and be enlightened by the deep mysteries of Christ, in Whom is '*hid all the treasures of wisdom*

---

[1] See James 4:6 and I Peter 5:5; see also Proverbs 3:34 (Septuagint).

[2] Romans 8:26.

and knowledge,' in Whom '*dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*' (Col. 2:3, 9). For you will perceive in Jesus that the Holy Spirit, Who enlightens the mind, descended into your soul so that it could see with an unveiled face.[1] '*No man*,' says the Apostle, '*can say that Jesus is the Lord, except by the Holy Spirit*' (I Cor. 12:3). Of course, it is through this that the Holy Spirit secretly confirms what is sought." (section 29)

St. Hesychius talks about the course of spiritual warfare in these and other similar places. There is more said in other parts of his book about each of the demonstrated methods of warfare, especially concerning attentiveness to the heart, dwelling there, and turning in the mind to the Lord in prayer. Resolve to look over the little book in its entirety. I will copy out several sections about this for you now.

"The great lawgiver Moses, or better, the Holy Spirit, said through him, 'Take heed that there be not a secret thought in your heart, an iniquity' (Deuteronomy 15:9). Secret thought is what he calls the idea of something evil (passionate), hated by God; this is also what the Fathers call a provocation, directed at the heart by the devil, to which, as soon as it appears to the mind, our thoughts immediately rush and there mingle passionately. (section 2)

"Attention is the unceasing silence of any thought in the heart, in which the spirit always, continuously and unceasingly breathes with and calls upon Jesus Christ the Son of God and God alone; courageously takes up arms with Him against the enemies; confesses to Him, who has the power to remit sins; often embraces Christ, the only One knowing the heart, with a secret invocation. (section 5)

"Sobriety is the continual situating of the thought at the doors of the heart, so that it sees the thoughts creeping up and understands what form the demons are attempting to inscribe and establish in the mind, so as to entice it through the imagination. (section 6)

---

[1] See II Corinthians 3:13-18.

"The thought standing (in the heart) and calling upon Christ against its enemies and running to Him is like a wild beast surrounded by many dogs and protected in a stronghold. It perceives intellectually from afar the intellectual ambushes of the invisible foes, and praying unceasingly to the peace-making Jesus against them, remains unharmed by them. (section 8)

"One who does not have prayer that is free from the thoughts is without a weapon for battle. I understand prayer to be that which is carried out unceasingly within the depths of the soul, so that the enemy who is secretly fighting may be vanquished and scorched by this invocation to Christ. For you must look with the sharply focused eye of the mind so that you will recognize what has entered into it, and after doing so, immediately cut off the head of the snake through refutation, and at the same time call on Christ with groaning. Through experience you will come to know God's invisible help; then you will see clearly the true condition of the heart. (sections 21, 22)

"Thus, the soul that makes bold concerning Christ invokes Him and is not in the least afraid, does not fight alone, but along with the fearful King, Jesus Christ, Creator of all that exists, corporeal and incorporeal, visible and invisible." (section 40)

I will limit myself to these excerpts, because if I were to copy out everything that is relevant here, it would be necessary to write out half the book. I wrote down these things to remind you what I have been telling you for a long time concerning remembrance of God and the inner struggle with the passions. Know that in this is the entire essence of the labor over the attainment of salvation.

After reading this, do not say to yourself, "Who am I to observe such rules, some sort of hermit in the desert?" You are not alone in asking this; there are many, many others. The only ones who do not ask are those who, although they have the most cause to be concerned for their salvation, do not give it any thought. Those who have begun this labor cannot talk like this. You, too, must act in the way prescribed immediately if you wish to live the spiritual life in which lies the attainment of salvation. If you want to live in a negligent manner, then of course nothing will come to you. I began writing about all this in the belief that your decision to belong to the Lord was sincere. A person whose decision is sincere cannot bypass the path prescribed. He may perform great labors and get around things in various ways, but until he comes upon this path, it is to no purpose. I am pointing you directly to the path so that you do not wander all over the place. Be more diligent in your undertaking, and you will soon see success. However, you must labor with all your might, because without labor there will be nothing.

Do not tolerate such worldly wisdom. The desert includes those living in a monastery or in the world who are attaining their salvation. For everyone the most important rule is to cleanse one's heart of the passions; one cannot cleanse it in any way other than that described. Do not give up at all and do not resist.

May the Lord bless you!

60.

CLEANSING THE HEART

How to act if during warfare with the passions
passionate thoughts and feelings erupt within us.
The cleansing of the heart.

May the grace of God be with you!

I suppose that you have set about things as you are supposed to, and that you diligently exert yourself to remember the Lord at all times, attend to your heart, and pursue any wrong impulse with a hostile rebuff, all the while appealing to the Lord in prayer for help. At the same time, however, I cannot in any way suppose your success to have been complete as soon as you began, that your thoughts would be pure, and feelings and desires holy. This is because it never happens like this to anybody. The thoughts will be pacified, the passionate impulses of feelings and desires will become less frequent. All the same, however, they will erupt, and sometimes with great force.

When they erupt, turn them out; when they erupt again, turn them out again. But this is already assumed. I just want to tell you now how you must react to lapses in judgment of the conscience. Should you react indifferently, or grieve over it and confess to the Lord? One should not react indifferently to these lapses, but each time after expelling them, one must grieve and confess to the Lord what happened. Even then, when passionate thoughts, feelings and desires suddenly erupt, without any participation of the assent, they signify all the same that the heart is impure and that out of it proceed evil thoughts (Matt. 15:19). And you are obliged to have a pure heart. Therefore you should be sorry that your heart is impure, and confess this impurity to the Lord, promising to toil over its impurity and praying to Him for help in this. But the assent is in fact frequently involved here. Because of your inattentiveness, you gave place to a passionate thought, and it succeeded in giving rise to a passionate feeling. You are guilty; why didn't you pay attention? Because of this inattentiveness and also because of the pleasantness of the feeling, you did not rush to arm yourself against it and drive it away, and it succeeded in giving rise to passionate desire. You are guilty; why did you allow the sinful and passionate enticement instead of arming yourself immediately? That you permitted the desire to give rise to the inclination to act, I cannot tolerate, because you may still allow the desire to persist and not arm yourself against it immediately. This makes you even more guilty. Thus, permitting the evil thought is one charge; allowing the arousal of evil feeling from it is another; permitting the engendering of evil desire from this evil feeling is the third charge; allowing evil desire to linger is the fourth charge. How many charges of guilt!

Do not try to conceal yourself, covering your nakedness with a fig leaf and hiding in the bushes from the Lord, who comes to you in the conscience and exposes you. Blame yourself completely, and ask forgiveness without placing blame on anyone else. Let us say that you got angry at the maid, and that you spoke to her with sharp words. Do not blame the maid. Even if she blundered, that is not the point, but that you got angry with her. Could you have not corrected her mistake without getting angry? Even if it is not possible to correct something, everything in general may be settled without anger. Here anger erupted, then blame, then envy, then conceit. For all of this, of course, there were external causes. It is not the causes that are to blame, however, but you, that you allowed such evil feelings. Try without concealing yourself to confess directly to the Lord and ask forgiveness. Do this each time when, having detecting an evil, you drive it out. You will make your peace with the Lord through this repentance and contrition, and through your conscience you will calmly look at the Lord again. But if you do not repent, you will not be able to look at Him in such a way; it would even be difficult and dangerous for you.

Do not put off repentance of these eruptions of the passions until evening , but cleanse yourself of them immediately, as soon as you have driven them away, in the name of the Lord. You will spend the entire day in repentance, because at first these eruptions will be frequent inside you. In the evening before prayer, review once again all the passionate eruptions in turn, grieve over them again with contrition, and repent. This is the act of daily repentance. Here again is the teaching of St. Hesychius for you, "At every hour we must weigh our daily affairs attentively, and as much as we are able, without fail lighten their burden through repentance, if we want to overcome the passions with the help of Jesus. It is also necessary to examine whether we carry out all our outward actions through God's will, before God and for God Alone, so that the feelings (passionate) do not deceive us like foolish people." (section 124)

If you act decisively and without self-pity as prescribed, you will soon see the fruit: Your heart will become tranquil, and joy in the Lord will begin to shine in it. Why is the heart troubled? Because the passions gnaw at it. Kill the passions, and it will receive peace. One of the Fathers likens the heart to a pit filled with snakes. These snakes are the passions. When a passion shows itself from the heart, it is like a snake thrusting its head out of the pit. Strike at its head in the name of the Lord, and it will recoil. When another shows itself, strike it, too. Strike down each one. You will have to strike dozens of blows at this snake, the passions, before it forgets to recoil and is completely killed off. However, the snakes will also die if you block up the snake pit or do not feed them. Likewise the passions will die out if you do not feed them with sympathy for their suggestions, but poison them instead with anger as soon as they appear.

This is the shortest path for you to purifying the heart of the passions. If you have come to love this purity, rush to it by this path, for there is no other. If you do not agree to act in this way, the passions will remain in the heart. You may correct your behavior and make it irreproachable without it, but your heart will remain passionate, and will not allow you to see the Lord. Do not forget the foolish virgins!

May God help you! Be saved!

61.

GUARDING THE HEARING AND SIGHT

The guarding of the hearing and sight. How to destroy bad impressions of what one has seen and heard.

I mentioned to you last time how the passionate thoughts, feelings and desires are aroused, and how you must not shift the blame onto them. Now I will tell you a little about them.

Passionate thoughts, followed by passionate feelings and desires, sometimes arise within the soul on their own, in some unknown way. For the most part, however, they are engendered by the influence of outward stimuli. The things, people and events that a person encounters excite ideas in him in accordance with their nature. Good thoughts are engendered from the good, while evil thoughts are engendered from the bad. Everything depends on the permanent or accidental state of the person who encounters them. Consequently, the answer also lies entirely with him. How can this be?

First. Do not give free reign to your senses, especially the eyes and ears. Do not allow them to see everything, hear everything and be concerned with everything indiscriminately. Your senses are like windows or doors, or better, like a pail. A person who opens the windows and lets in bad air is doing wrong. A person who opens the doors and lets all kinds of livestock come into his house is going to be reprimanded. But what would you say if someone were to take a pail (or a cup or mug) and go to a dirty, unclean puddle and draw from it and pour it over himself? Can you think of anything more stupid? And yet, isn't someone doing the same thing when he stops in front of some bad person out of curiosity and listens to profane words? A smattering of evil thoughts is picked up through this; these turn into evil feelings and desires, and the person walks around distressed, as if in some sort of fog. Thus, prudence and the responsibility for maintaining one's inner peace require that one not look at everything, listen to everything or concern himself with everything that he happens to come across. A thing will hardly show that it is capable of rousing the passions, so it is necessary to turn the eyes away from it, plug up the ears in front of it, or seeing do not see and hearing do not hear.

Second. Evil thoughts have been engendered from some evil stimulus. It is necessary to rush immediately to blot out the stimulus and suppress the thoughts using the method shown earlier, after the flow of stimuli has been stopped, of course. It would be foolish to remain under the influence of the bad stimulus, or to postpone blotting it out and restoring peace of mind until another time. By remaining under the influence of the stimulus willingly, we encourage the breeding of evil thoughts and feelings. By leaving the evil within ourself for a long time, we give it the opportunity to become more deeply implanted and then further oppose expulsion and cleansing, if not to take complete possession of the mind.

Third. Once a person has experienced harm from some stimulus, he should not willingly allow himself to encounter the objects that caused it again. This would signify that the person acting in this way delights in the evil thing, and consequently is impure to the bottom of the heart. If some necessity should force him to encounter it again, then he must arm himself ahead of time and prepare his heart to resist the evil stimulus and not allow it to enter himself. Attentiveness, increased resistance on the person's part and prayer will make this possible.

Fourth. I already wrote you about reinterpreting everything you encounter and that you might encounter in the spiritual sense. It is necessary to do this also with respect to objects of evil significance. After encountering them, you will not have bad thoughts, but good ones instead, in the same way when St. Ephraim the Syrian, having encountered an enticingly dressed woman, told his disciples, "You see how she takes care to adorn her body, which will soon be dust; how can we not be concerned with adorning our immortal soul?"

These rules are sufficient. It would be proper to indicate those contingencies in your everyday life that are harmful to your inner life. But I suppose that there are none, either in your immediate family or relatives. You would not come across them in any way except outside the home, for example, in the society in which you spend little time, as you wrote. With regard to such *contingencies,* keep to what was written in the third point. Then place all similar things you encounter in the future under this rule. Make it a general rule to measure what is permissible by the influence that it exerts inwardly. You may permit yourself that which is constructive; do not permit that which disturbs in any form. Who in his right mind would knowingly drink from a glass into which poison has been poured?!

I do not have in mind that you restrict yourself and become a recluse. I just want to guide you toward the decision to not take in what is harmful for your spirit, since you determined that the only true life is that in the spirit, and have also experienced this.

May the Lord bless you!

62.

ACTIVE WARFARE WITH THE PASSIONS

After guidance in noetic warfare with the passions instruction is offered about active warfare with them. The most drastic external way of life for battle with the passions. Conclusion of the discussion about warfare with the passions.

May the grace of God be with you!

With regard to guidance for the cleansing of the passions, what has been said is sufficient, because they are within you to such a small degree. As we have already begun talking about it, however, I will add a little more which you may find useful right now, not at some point in the future.

The warfare prescribed with the passions is spiritual. It is real, because by not permitting the passions to feed on something, it exhausts them. But there is also active warfare with the passions that consists in the deliberate undertaking and carrying out of actions that are directly opposed to those passions. For example, to suppress stinginess, it is necessary to become generous; to combat pride, it is necessary to choose humbling occupations; to combat carousing, one must stay at home; and the like. It is true that one such mode of action does not lead directly to the goal, because the passion, enduring external constraint, may erupt inwardly—either that same passion, or some other in its place. When inner and spiritual warfare are united with this active combat, however, they soon defeat any passion against which they are directed together.

So it is that I offer you advice. Work at finding your primary passion and direct active as well as spiritual warfare against it. I cannot tell just what your primary passion is. Maybe it is as yet undefined; nevertheless, if you begin looking after the heart's impulses more rigorously, it will make itself known to you. Then, if you care to trust me, we will decide together how to cope with your main weakness in the quickest possible way.

I would also remind you that there are drastic methods of active warfare with the passions. There is the life of worldly renunciation, where a person who has decided to give up everything and who has placed all hope in the Lord enters a monastery to live in humble obedience, strict abstinence, diligent prayer and cheerful sobriety . There is nothing lacking here; the cutting off of one's will and not feeling sorry for one's self soon threshes all that is passionate out of the soul. Then a peaceful disposition of the heart and purity of the heart, the ultimate goals of the life of renunciation, are established. I am not driving you away from the world. You can be saved in it, if you conduct yourself with respect to it as if you were not of it. I am bringing this up as a way of life that is conducive to the cleansing of the passions from the heart.

I would also add that one of the laws of Divine Economy concerning us is the arrangement of each person's life and the course of events in it so that the person, making wise use of them, may cleanse himself of the passions in the quickest and most convenient way. I am reminding you of this because when you asked why people have different fates and why these fates are so variable, it seems I did not answer you. So now I will answer you why. It is because the Lord arranges the most convenient means for people to be cleansed of passions, or because He wants in this way to grind to dust the squalid selfishness and stubborn egoism which maintain the passions that destroy a person.

I would add one more thing. Kill the passions both inwardly and externally, and cultivate your good aspects, giving them full range and exercise. The main thing is prayer. We have already spoken of this. After this follows the labor of good deeds. We spoke about this when you were contemplating some of the broader goals of life. Along with this, spiritually beneficial reading and conversation must take place; prayers and daily Scripture readings must be carried out as well as deeds of self-mortification—renounce yourself when it is necessary, be sparing in food, sleep, entertainment and in all the pleasures of self-amusement, and conduct yourself in continual self-denial and self-restraint. We have also spoken about this.

Here is the entire course of cleansing oneself of the passions. You already have all of this under way. May God speed.

63.

SINGING AND MUSIC

Cares around the house. Singing and music.

I hurried to bring our discussion of the struggle with the passions to an end a little sooner—although it is impossible to get to the end of it—and I left much of what you wrote during this time almost without a reply. You will find the answer to some things in what has been prescribed for you, and I will answer the other things now.

You write that you have a lot of troubles around the house. Do everything you are told with diligence. This is your duty. But busy yourself, do not be troubled. Troubles (cares) are accompanied by agitation of everything within, and this is something that is not proper. Perhaps it is impossible to consider each errand calmly and then go do it, not in the least disturbed, with your thoughts collected. In everyday life, if there is something hindering spiritual life, then it is not an activity or occupation at all, but a vain, intricate care that gnaws at the heart and at the same time is not capable of advancing (spiritual) activity forward by even a hair. These arousals, in stirring up the thoughts, are like a whirlwind. A hubbub always results, and spiritual activity gets nowhere at all. Distinguish, if you will, proper zeal from improper care and worries, and practice doing all activities soberly, without deviating from the Lord in thought, but on the contrary, maintaining the conviction that you are pleasing Him by all this.

You ask, "How should one be with regard to singing and playing on the piano and harmonium? I used to sing and play without paying attention to the content of the pieces, and now it is on my mind. As you certainly know, not all pieces have good content, although they may have a nice melody." What should you do? It is impossible for you to change everything at once. This is immediately obvious. Sing and play as you used to, trying not to pay attention to the content. In the meantime, start selecting songs with good or perhaps just tolerable content, and sing and play these more, until finally you completely forget the others that make up your singing and playing. The harmonium is very capable of expressing church hymns in the necessary manner. Get the compositions of Turchaninov, and learn the ones you like best.

Learn "God Save the Tsar," "How Glorious is our Lord in Sion," and the like. If you sing these with complete feeling, I assure you that you will like this sort of singing better than the other. You will then be asked to sing and play not some frivolous little songs, but these majestic compositions. Some time ago, you said that you receive compliments on your voice and singing. They do what they do, and you do what you do. When both things are good, it would be impossible not to praise you. But you should not pride yourself on what people say, you should be humble. Where did your voice and taste for singing come from? God gave these to you. Why did God give them?

To stir up rumors among other people, or for some other reason? For no other reason than that you turn them to the praise of God. Have you done this? No. You have only amused yourself and others, but you have made no mention of God at all.

Therefore, you have misused your Divine gift, squandering it on frivolous things. Now the thoughts that you turned toward pleasing God should also be turned toward using your Divine gift. If one is to eat and drink to the glory of God, the more so should one sing and play music. If you were to play and sing something that made an impression on the souls of the listeners and caused them to be inspired toward the Lord and rise up to Him with praise and thanksgiving, you would be doing the same thing that a good preacher does in church. This is the fruit of your gift! Direct, as you will, the use of it toward this. Select both secular and religious songs that are edifying and sing and play only these. This is for other people; you should never sing secular songs for yourself, just religious ones. I repeat again, do not change everything suddenly, but gradually.

In general, do not show idiosyncrasies in anything. Be polite, good-humored and cheerful with everyone, as always. Just refrain from laughter, merrymaking and any kind of idle speech. Even without this it is possible to be polite and cheerful and agreeable. Never be gloomy in any way. When the Savior told those who are fasting to smile, anoint their heads and wash their faces, He meant that they should not be gloomy.

May the Lord enlighten you!

64.

SOLITUDE

Solitude. How to avoid boredom.
Reading and the studying of science.

May the grace of God be upon you!

You write, "I am left alone and I am bored." This is a natural feeling. But it seems to me that you should not feel this way after the decisions you made and what you were told to do in consequence of this. If the latter took root in you at all, then you would never have realized that you were alone, even though you are by yourself. You would not have realized you were alone, because you would have realized that the Lord is close by, as is your Guardian Angel—not in thought, but in actuality. Then the feeling of loneliness would have seemed out of place, and consequently, the boredom that follows. I suppose, however, that this incursion of boredom was momentary for you, and quickly dissipated.

Always, however, in the future, each time you find yourself alone, renew as quickly as possible the conviction that the Lord and your Guardian Angel are with you, and rush to take advantage of these chance moments of solitude for undistracted sojourning with the Lord and sweet conversation with Him. Solitude in this spirit is sweet. I hope you will taste this sweetness sometime, so that you will desire it as Paradise on earth.

Recently, while looking through a book, I came across the advice of a father (Count Speransky) to his daughter. Among other things, he tells how to avoid boredom. This is what he advises: everyone, he says, has a number of daily chores, which they work off like some sort of quitrent. There are many people, however, for whom these quitrent chores are simple and do not take much time. There is a lot of time left over whereby, if it is not filled with anything, there is no way to avoid boredom. Here is the most reliable way for you to avoid it: Arrange things so you do not have a single idle moment and all your time is filled with suitable occupations so that, upon completion of one activity, you have another one ready to begin.

What kind of activities should these be? 1) Aesthetic occupations: music, singing, painting. 2) Some sort of handicraft: knitting, needlework and the like. 3) The best remedy for boredom, however, is to acquire a taste for serious reading and the study of subjects that you are unfamiliar with. It is not so much the reading that drives away boredom as the study.

I was going to tell you this recipe against boredom just in case, but then the need for it arose. Take it into consideration and get organized in this way. You truly will not experience boredom anymore. I know a certain person who is always alone. He never goes out himself, and never receives any guests. When you ask him if he ever gets bored, he answers, "I have no time, because there is so much to do. As soon as I wake up, I start doing things, and never manage to get everything done by bedtime."

I would note for you that the study Count Speransky is referring to is the study of entire sciences, or certain parts of them. By this, it is obvious that one avoids any reading of frivolous books. It seems that you do not like to do this anyway. That is good. Do not give up this habit. Read more the spiritual books (than scientific ones). This is the sphere of the most serious subjects, and, most importantly, the most necessary. In this sphere everything is new and never becomes obsolete. The more you learn, the more you will discover subjects that are as yet unfamiliar. The desire to learn these subjects and the predisposition to their cognition occurs only when one in fact sets out on the path of spiritual life. I consider that from the moment you decided to please the Lord, you have been no stranger to this path. Read then, as you like, books on these subjects, and become wise. May the Lord bless you!

65.

ST. POEMEN ON THE GOD-PLEASING LIFE

A passage from St. Poemen about the God-pleasing life, the conquest of the passions and the sowing of the virtues.

Who got you interested in St. Poemen so that you want to know more about him? No matter who it was, I am very glad of it. You will find who St. Poemen was and how he lived in the Menaion under August 27, and also in the book *Sayings Concerning the Ascetic Deeds of the Saints and Blessed Fathers.* You will find a number of his sayings in these places. He was from a simple family and was uneducated, but the experiences of spiritual life and grace of God so enlightened his mind that because of his astute, precise knowledge of the laws of the rising up to perfection of the spirit, it is fitting to place him among the first of the instructive Fathers wise in the ways of God.

Until you get to reading about him, I will write down for you the most important points from his teaching and sayings that relate to what I have been explaining to you for a long time.

Repentance and grieving over one's sins is the beginning of the Divine path. This is what you encounter in St. Poemen.

He saw a woman who was sitting on a grave and weeping bitterly, and he said, "If all the pleasures of the world were to appear here, they would not free her soul from grief. We too must continually grieve thus." (saying 26) The 72nd saying also recounts a similar situation, and the words of St. Poemen are quoted in this way, "I assure you that if man does not do away with all fleshly desires and does not thus weep, he cannot become one with God. This woman's entire soul and life were absorbed in grief."

A person who repents and grieves over his sins naturally shuns evil and does good. Until he is this way, he may not undertake to do evil by deed, but he cannot be free from wicked thoughts. That is why his shunning of evil consists almost entirely in struggle with the thoughts. This is what St. Poemen talks about.

One of the brothers went to Abba Poemen and said to him, "Father! I have many thoughts, and I am in danger because of them." The old man took him outside and said, "Expand your chest and do not inhale!" "I cannot do that," answered the brother. "If you cannot do that, then neither can you stem the flow of the thoughts," said the old man. "But your job is to resist them." (saying 28)

Your job is to resist them, but how? First of all, be attentive to yourself and be sober. A brother said that when he was with others, he would amuse himself and return to his cell not the same as when he left it. He asked how he should act. The elder told him, "When you return to your cell, do you want to find yourself the same as when you left? Maintain vigilance over yourself both at home and outside the home."(137) "In general," Abba Poemen would say, "the thing you need most is a sober mind." (135)

When maintaining vigilance over yourself, as soon as you observe the passionate, immediately pray and it will go away. A brother asked Abba Poemen about the struggle with rebellious thoughts, and the Elder answered him, "This situation is like a man who has fire on one side, and a cup of water on the other. When the fire begins to scorch, he takes water from the cup and puts it out. Fire is the suggestion of the enemy (the passions), while water is earnest prayer to God." (146)

To suffer less from passionate thoughts, it is necessary to remove oneself from occasions that arouse them. One must remove himself from everything passionate, said Abba Poemen. A man who is close to something that could engender passion is like someone standing over a deep precipice into which the man's enemy may easily throw him. But the man who removes himself from that which is capable of arousing passion is like someone standing far from the precipice. Let the enemy drag him so as to toss him into the abyss, but while he is dragging him along by force, the man will call out to God and God will help him. (59)

The most important thing is to try in every way possible not to give in to the thoughts. For encouraging this, we read the following in the sayings about St. Poemen, "A brother asked him whether a person could always suppress his thoughts without yielding to the enemy in a single one?" The elder answered, 'There are those who suppress ten but yield one.' That very same brother asked the same thing of Abba Sisoes, and he said, 'Indeed, there are those who yield nothing to the enemy.'" (88, 89)

Another: Abba Anoub asked Abba Poemen about impure thoughts that are engendered in the human heart and about vain desires. Abba Poemen answered him, *Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?* (Isaiah 10:15) *Do not give them a hand, and they will not do anything.* (15)

What then will come of this unyielding? The passions will die away. That is what Abba Poemen told Abba Isaiah when the latter asked him about impure thoughts. He said, "If a trunk full of clothing is not looked after, then in time the clothing will disintegrate. So too will the thoughts, if we do not in fact carry them out, vanish in time, as if they disintegrated." (20)

Abba Joseph asked Abba Poemen about the same thing, and he said, "If someone were to place a snake and a scorpion in a jar and close it up, then in time, of course, the creatures would suffocate. So too will bad thoughts that come from the demons die away, if we resist them patiently and do not feed them." (21)

However, in shunning evil through such ruthless opposition to passionate thoughts and desires, one must at the same time do good, cultivating every sort of virtue within oneself. Through both these things the heart will soon be purified. There are many lessons in St. Poemen about cultivating virtue. Here are the most important ones.

He quotes a saying of Abba John the Dwarf, who said, "I desire to possess every virtue, if only to a small degree." (46) Further on he offers his own lesson about this, saying, "When a man decides to build a house, he gathers many different materials for construction. So too must we acquire all the virtues, if only to a small degree." (130)

There are, however, virtues that are fundamental and provide guidance, and that is why one must direct all efforts toward them. St. Poemen often indicates which ones these are. For example: "Maintaining self-vigilance, being attentive to one's self, and discernment are the three virtues that guide the soul. (35)

"Fall down before God, humble yourself and reject your own will; these are the working tools of the soul!" (36) "In the Scriptures it is written, 'Though these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job, were in it, as I live, they shall deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God'"(Ezekiel 14:14 and 20). "Noah represents poverty; Job, patience; Daniel, discernment. If a man has these three virtues, then the Lord dwells in him." (60) "The three fundamental virtues are the fear of God, prayer and charity toward one's neighbor." (160)

Abba Poemen had a layman tell the brothers the following, “I do not know how to speak from the Scriptures, so I will tell you a parable. A man said to his friend, ‘I want to go see the king. Come with me.’ The friend answered him, ‘I will go with you half-way.’ He said to another friend, ‘Take me to the king.’ He said, ‘I will take you as far as the king’s palace.’ The man said to a third person, ‘Come with me to the king.’ ‘Let’s go,’ replied the third friend, ‘I will go with you to the king’s palace, bring you inside, announce your arrival and present you to him.’ Abba Poemen asked the layman, ‘What does this parable mean?’ He replied, ‘The first friend is asceticism, which leads you to the true path; the second is purity, which takes you to Heaven; the third friend is almsgiving, which will fearlessly bring you to the King Himself, God.’” (109)

When, in this way, you do not yield to the passions on the one hand, and you cultivate the virtues on the other hand, the heart gradually softens (182), warms up and receives within itself the Divine flame, which you have only to look after to be safe. Abba Poemen says concerning this, “When a pot is warmed by a fire, then no fly or other creature can touch it; but when it becomes cold, then they perch on it. It is the same way with the soul: So long as it is in a state of spiritual activity (enthusiasm of the spirit for God), the enemy cannot affect it.” (111)

These excerpts are sufficient for you. You will find for yourself the other things that are necessary and valuable for you in St. Poemen. I just wanted to use these excerpts to refresh your memory about all that we have talked about earlier. Here is the entire path that you have set out on. Indeed, no matter which Father you begin to read, you will find essentially the same thing in each, although they differ in their portrayal and explanation.

May you become wise! Lord give the blessing!

66.

A JOURNEY TO THE ST. SERGIUS LAVRA

A journey to the St. Sergius Lavra. An instruction to pilgrims.

Well, who did direct you to St. Poemen?! Someone who speaks enthusiastically about Godly things. I am guessing. I suppose it was the same person who was with you when you came to see me. I am very glad there is someone close to you who is able to speak like that. Take advantage of him, and each time he visits you, get him to talk on these subjects, drag everything out of him and acquire it for yourself.

You want to go to St. Sergius Monastery! Good. May God bless you to go. And you are going to walk! That is twice, three times as good! So that other people do not gossip, you may keep this to yourself. If that is impossible, let them talk. But you mistakenly suppose that this will be a pleasant stroll. It is fifty versts; perhaps you will cover this in a pleasant manner, but then you will begin to feel something you did not expect. You will get there in two days. You will find out the first night what walking means, if you did not already know. Do not forget to bring a little flask of vodka with salt and rub it into your legs at night. By evening they will not feel like yours. Rub the vodka in, and by morning they will be a little better. In the morning you will not set out as you did from Moscow, but get moving. You may return by train, because you would hardly be able to endure another two days of walking. But do as your heart suggests. This is labor for the Lord; He will give you the strength. And He will give something afterwards, either perceptible or imperceptible. St. Sergius will also give something. God gives the saints the ability to see what believers do for them and to hear what they ask of them. This is only if everything comes from the heart. Just as a telegraph in a single instant lets people in St. Petersburg and other places know what is going on in Moscow, so too does what is born in the heart make itself known in a single instant to the one to whom it is directed.

St. Sergius has been watching you since you made plans to go visit him. When you set out on your trip, he will watch after you more closely, and even more closely when you come to his monastery, having endured the journey good-naturedly and with the joy of the labor. Lord give the blessing! Just do not expect comforts, but fatigue, callouses and aching bones. Prepare to offer sacrifice, and not to get pleasure.

While you are on the road, repeat unceasingly the short prayer I have written you about; otherwise the thoughts will bring you who knows where in the wilderness. They could bring you to that which one ought not think of in general, and especially while on a pilgrimage. When you are tired of repeating the prayer, take up one of the psalms and recite it from memory with reflection. Recite *Have mercy on me, O God* or *O God be attentive unto helping me*, or some other psalm that you know. Do not worry about anything except reciting it from beginning to end and thinking it over and feeling its content. Understand each word after asking questions about it, such as, why was this said and where will it lead me? Being thus absorbed, you will not even notice the versts as they go by. Reciting psalms from the memory with reflection during a journey was a rule of the first great Fathers Anthony and Pachomius. They required anyone who became one of their disciples to memorize without fail several psalms by heart. Whoever could not read learned to read after he had memorized the psalms by listening to someone else recite. After learning a few psalms, he had to recite them while sitting at work and especially when going somewhere. Do this, if you will, in imitation of the ancient monks.

Do not forget to confess and take Communion of the Holy Mysteries in the monastery.

The labor of travel will be in place of the labors of fasting and attending services. Confession is not difficult for you now after the last, the one that was done thoroughly. Do not hide anything that the conscience disapproves, whether great or small. But do not overlook the most important thing, tears of contrition. One little tear, and you will be like someone who has been to the bath house.

I wanted to write you something previously concerning tears, but I forgot. I will write something now. You get books to read from the library. Get Zhukovsky and read "The Peri and the Angel." This is in the fifth volume, it seems. It is morally edifying and long. I will tell you briefly about the content. A peri is a spirit, one that was induced to fall away from God but that came to its senses and returned to Heaven. After arriving at the gates of Heaven, however, he found them closed. The angel guarding them said, "There is hope that you can enter, but bring a worthy gift." The peri flew to the earth. He saw a war. A valiant soldier was dying, and in dying tears he was praying to God for his fatherland. The peri caught a tear and took it to Heaven. The gates, however, did not open. The angel told him, "It is a nice gift, but it cannot open the gates of Heaven for you. This means that all civic virtues are good, but they alone do not lead to Heaven." The peri flew back to earth. He saw a plague. A handsome man was dying. His betrothed was selflessly caring for him, but she was becoming infected herself. No sooner had she closed his eyes than she, too, fell dead on his chest. There were tears. The peri caught one and brought it, but the gates of Heaven were still closed. The angel said to him, "It is a nice gift, but it cannot open the gates of Heaven for you. This means that family virtues alone also will not bring one to heaven. Search! There is hope." The peri returned to earth once again. He found someone who was repenting. He took a tear and brought it. As he approached Heaven, all the doors were already open to him. Thus, bring, if you will, such tears to the Lord. There is joy in Heaven that someone weeps and is contrite, feeling his sinfulness. This is the most trustworthy path for us, *Repent and believe the gospel* (Mark 1:15).

May the Lord bless you!

67.

DILIGENT CONFESSION

Consolation of a pilgrim. Instruction about careful Confession. Short prayers and unceasing attentiveness to God.

You have made your journey! Thanks be to God! As you see, my prediction about fatigue and aches and pains came to pass. What was promised for your soul also came to pass. The Lord comforted you with the joy of Holy Communion, and St. Sergius drove away your disturbance.

You write, "There arose in my soul a powerful and alarming disturbance. I appealed to St. Sergius, and the disturbance instantly vanished; it was replaced by a calm and pleasant peace." So you see, a cry from the heart is heard immediately in Heaven, and a reply to it is sent down immediately. Learn from this where you need to seek peace and understanding.

It was not good, however, that you did not admit to any sins at Confession. Be it great or small, of word or of deed; as soon as the conscience tells you something is a sin, you must cleanse it through Confession and repentance. The essence of the Mystery of Repentance consists in the resolution of the sin you have confessed. An unconfessed sin is not resolved, but remains in the soul, and will go with it to the next world. There will be a black stain, all the more noticeable on a white garment. Craftiness will be of no use there. It is necessary to do not what is set down by people, but by the Lord Himself. The Lord says, *Do thou first confess thy transgressions, that thou mayest be justified* (Isaiah 43:26). To comfort us and facilitate this, which is not always an easy matter, He set down this law, *Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven* (Matt. 18:18). Learn well and take into your heart that everything that is not resolved (loosed) on earth in a Godly way will remain unresolved also in Heaven. Make up this deficiency as soon as possible. Now when you repent of the sin you omitted from Confession, you must also repent of the fact that you deliberately omitted it.

You did well in maintaining your short prayer for almost the entire way. Learn never to be without it. It will focus the attention and drive out idle and vain thought, and keep you in a state to receive understanding in the hour of need from the Lord through your Guardian Angel. The little prayer is a great treasure. It has no equal among spiritual activities. Try to stand attentively in the heart with it, and not just to repeat the words unceasingly, but to keep remembrance of the Lord, combining reverential fear with this. God is everywhere. Whether we are thinking about Him or not, He is there all the same wherever we are, and He sees everything. Judging by human standards, how sorrowful it is for Him when we do not pay attention to Him, although He maintains everything, takes care of everyone and provides everyone with everything good. Exclude yourself from the group of those who are inattentive, and do not forget to turn your mind's eye to the Lord, or at least maintain the feeling that He is near, just as we sense that the sun is overhead and warming us even though we do not look at it. Turning mentally to God with reverence from the heart is already prayer. Do this as soon as there is an opportunity. Do not worry too much if there is no opportunity during the day to stand before icons and make prostrations. Render all of this to the Lord during morning and evening prayer. You should read, reflect and pray a little longer at those times. Go to sleep, and then, after waking up a little earlier, get out of bed as soon as possible and engage in sweet conversation with the Lord. Start the morning in the right way, and the entire day will go well. Remembrance of God, reading the Gospel and Epistle and other spiritually beneficial books will reveal and confirm ideas within you about what is truly worthwhile. The conscience will take these ideas under its guardianship and begin putting them into practice by not permitting you to deviate from the actions they dictate. The blessed life will ensue. Just keep this as law: Never do anything, whether great or small, that goes against the conscience. If you should violate this, compensate the conscience at once through your own inner repentance at home. Confess it to the priest later. The conscience is a great thing. It is the voice of the Omnipresent God in the soul. He who is in the world with the conscience is also in the world with God.

May the Lord bless you!

68.

THE NEED OF A GOOD COUNSELOR

Idle talk and the discussions of men. The need of a good counselor. Constant danger from the enemy.

May the grace of God be with you!

Your words, "A rumor went around," had quite an effect on my heart! Oh, how terrible and biting is the fire of speech and the suspicious eye of man! It is clear why the holy prophet David in the psalms often appeals to God with heartfelt sorrow to deliver him from the human tongue.

Where are you to find comfort and support? In the testimony of your conscience. Keep this consciousness of the moral worth of your actions before God and all sober-minded people in your mind and heart. With this you will courageously encounter every kind of speech, no matter what is said. At the same time you should treat everyone as if you know nothing.

It is impossible in everyday life to completely ignore what people are saying or what they will say. In general, the prudent thing here should be to go only to the extent that you conduct your affairs in such a way so as not to provoke the speech and offend the eyes of men. You do not have to go any further, say to the extent where you give up doing things that are considered necessary.

Well, have you expressed any sort of peculiarity up to this point ?! Possibly the fact that you went to St. Sergius?! But this was not done publicly, and you were among your own kind. Or that you go to church for Vigil and Liturgy on Sundays and feast days?! But this is a duty that is faithfully carried out by all Christians who keep in mind that they are Christians. One may be excused from this only by extreme necessity without bringing reproach for laziness and neglect of one's Christianity. Do not imitate the bad habits of the upper class ladies of Moscow or listen to their vain words. That is today; tomorrow is death. Death has no regard for beautiful women; it cuts them down as well. After death, there will be an immediate accounting. The clever-mindedness of upper class ladies will by no means be taken into consideration there.

Do not be troubled by words, then. You do everything for your part so as not to provoke them. If, in spite of everything, they happen, then let them. The witness of the conscience before God is sufficient, as I said, for the comforting and strengthening of your courage. Let everyone judge you, but if God justifies you in the conscience, these judgments will amount to nothing. An observant person was telling me that as soon as men's words latch onto something that is truly unpleasant, they hang over a person like a cloud that does not give any rain, and then depart. Their traces grow cold, and no one remembers what was said anymore. It will be the same with you, I think. I wish this for you from the bottom of my heart. Conduct yourself equably, as usual, as if you do not notice anything.

In place of the severity of asceticism, which is not applicable to your way of life, take the fear of God and remembrance of death, and they will teach you everything.

Write about everything. Secretiveness in everyday life is not a bad thing; in spiritual life, however, it is the most dangerous. It is indispensable to have someone with whom you may consult about everything that is going on outwardly, and more importantly, inwardly. Write just as we have already discussed. There is some sort of evil power around us and inside us, which through various illusory qualities leads us into deception and confuses our affairs, directing them to something vain or even bad. The enemy is sitting quite near and urging on everything under his hand. There is a lot to help against him and one's own reasoning; there is the fact that you should not do every deed that seems good immediately, but examine it thoroughly before acting. When you begin your examination, the suggestions of good that the enemy uses to disguise his provocations immediately disperse. Your reasoning, however, does not always work, because the enemy often confuses it with his own advice (our elders have nicknamed this "add-vice"). Write, then, and tell everything. If you should find someone there, you will be able to discuss everything more often.

May the Lord save you and have mercy on you! Live and learn.

Take care of yourself. Mistakes will show you how to act more correctly next time.

69.

DEPRESSION AND FEAR

Depression and fear. Innocent distraction. Severing relationships with immoral people. An English apostle from a Pentecostal sect. His falsehood.

May the grace of God be with you!

Your depression mixed with dread is somehow unclear. What is wrong with you? You have everything in order, both at home and in your soul. You will overcome it; what should you do?! Pray to God and entrust your fate and that of everyone close to you to Him. This is the most reliable way to peace! You should have but one concern—to not do anything that would anger God. You will have firm hope and lasting peace from this.

That you have some family amusements is fine. Just do not get carried away. Do not forget God, and thank Him for every comfort, accepting such comfort as coming from His hands. Then when you seclude yourself, fall down before the Lord more diligently, asking Him to give you understanding and indicate life's paths. It happens that amusements, especially pleasant ones, give rise to depression, because while they are not sinful, they are unable to content the heart. Generally speaking, the inconstancy of the emotions is characteristic to us. It is necessary to discard and overcome this, being concerned that one thing does not change; that is, that your most important decision, the goal of life you chose for yourself, always remain in force.

Can this really be?! God is asking your heart once and for all, and the heart desires God. For without God it is never satisfied, it is bored; examine yourself from this aspect. Maybe you will find the door to the peace of God there.

That you broke off with one of your friends is a very good thing; her charming and ingratiating manner influenced you in a way that was not at all conducive to the goal of life you planned for yourself. You made mention of this influence at one time, but I neglected to tell you to watch out. Well, thank God! Now the affair has taken a turn for the better of its own accord. It is not proper, of course, to allow all kinds of hostile things into the heart. Do not permit yourself to trust her any more or take her pleasant words to heart. Behave equably, and do not upset peaceful relations.

You ask what to think about some English apostle. Your own words tell what to think about him. He says that the Lord appears to him and tells him what to do and what to say. Don't you and those around you see that he is a deceiver? If the Lord appeared to him, He would not have sent him to us, but to the Turks, for instance, or some other nonbelievers. The Lord Himself has repeatedly confirmed and continues to confirm our faith through miracles, the holy relics and the appearances of Him and His saints. There is nothing to teach us. On the contrary, he needs to learn from us. This apostle does not come from the traditional English church, but from some peculiar one that appeared recently. A pentecostal sect recently appeared there. Someone got it into his head that what happened to the Apostles must be repeated in the church of Christ; that is, that the Holy Spirit descended visibly and acted visibly in believers. Some people, mostly women, believed him. They began thinking how to achieve this. They thought and thought, and came up with something. Somehow they became convinced that the Holy Spirit was acting in them specifically, and they began convincing others of this. They fabricated a few suspicious miracles and began trumpeting them everywhere. Quite a few gullible people gathered around them. They separated from the others and established their own ecclesiastical order. There is a sect for you!

This is the sort of milieu your apostle comes from. He explains everything about the Holy Spirit, that everyone must without fail be filled with His grace to be saved. This idea is totally correct. I revealed this to you in our first letters. But this is the only true thing he says. Everything else is a lie! He cries, "Believe, believe, and the Holy Spirit will come." This is his biggest lie! Faith is indeed an indispensable condition for receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, but the very receiving of the gift comes about not from faith alone, but from faith through the Divinely-established Mysteries. This is how it was even in Apostolic times. Here is a case in point. St. Paul arrived in Ephesus, and after encountering several believers there, he asked them whether they had received the Holy Spirit. They answered they had not even heard of the Holy Spirit. It turned out that they were baptized only with the baptism of John. St. Paul then baptized them with the baptism of Christ, and after that he laid his hands on them and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. They had been renewed by Baptism, but they had not received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was imparted to them through the apostolic laying on of hands, while Baptism only gave them the ability to receive the gift and made them worthy of it. As it was with these believers, so has it been for all believers, both during Apostolic times and afterward. That is how it has been to this time in the Divine Church, namely through Holy Chrismation, which the Apostles themselves introduced in place of the laying on of hands.

All of us who have been baptized and chrismated have the gift of the Holy Spirit. Everyone has the gift, but it is not active in everyone. How to make it active is explained in my first letters. Take some time to review this again. I would add here only that there is no other way to this gift.

Go and ask the English apostle whether he himself has the gift of the Holy Spirit. He does not. For the English do not have the Mystery of Chrismation, without which, just as without the laying on of the Apostolic hands, the Holy Spirit never descended and never will. The English have only two Mysteries, that of Baptism and Communion, but they have no Mystery of Chrismation. Consequently, they also do not have the gift of the Holy Spirit. This apostle also does not have it. Therefore, he is talking about something he does not know about and preaches about receiving something that he himself does not have. You will not observe in his speeches even a mention of how the Holy Spirit is received. He talks only about the necessity for having Him, and then cries out, "Believe!" This is like saying, "Open your mouth and the Holy Spirit will fly in."

How appropriate are the Lord's words for this apostle, "Physician, heal thyself!"

Be convinced, if you will, and pass my ideas on to others, especially that fellow who enjoys discussing religious subjects at your place. Such a view of the apostle may become more widely dispersed through him.

May the Lord bless you! Be saved!

70.

ON THE READING OF SPIRITUAL AND SECULAR BOOKS

On the reading of spiritual and secular books.

May the grace of God be with you!

I am sending you the writings of St. Anthony by your request. Read and be absorbed. You will be surprised. He was not educated and did not read books of learned men; he only sang the Psalter and read the Gospel along with the Epistle. The grace of God revealed contemplation in his mind, and you see how wise his words are. There are eyewitness accounts of him that tell how when he began to speak, his words flowed like a river and, coming from his heart, they filled the hearts of his listeners. Sometimes they spent entire nights in conversation, and neither he nor those listening to him became tired or felt like going to sleep. We had Father Seraphim of Sarov who was also uneducated, but his experiences in spiritual life, absorption in the word of God and writings of the Fathers made him a wise man among the wise. Books are only for guidance in the spiritual life. Knowledge itself is acquired through deeds. Even that which is known from reading, clear and detailed though it be, presents itself in an entirely different light when experienced through deeds. The spiritual life is such a realm into which the wisdom of this world cannot penetrate. You yourself will experience this or are already doing so. Work on yourself and be attentive to yourself. Little by little, you will reach the point where you will begin holding wise conversations which you should sit down and write out! May the Lord bless you!

You write, "I read a lot; is this bad?" It can be bad and it can be good, depending on what you read and how you read it. Read with discrimination and verify what is being read through the genuine truth of our faith. What agrees with it, accept; what does not agree with it, reject as thought against God, and throw out any book that expresses such thoughts. You have begun studying spiritual life. This is a subject that encompasses a lot, is lofty and sweet for the heart, in which you cannot help but see the uttermost good. You have taken this up and are learning, both from books and even more from deeds. You already know what kind of books you should read, and you also understand how to arrange your personal life. If you seriously desire to set out on this path, then you will never take up the study of other subjects. You went to school and have a general knowledge of everything; this is sufficient for you.

You will say, "I will become backward!" What kind of misfortune is that! Backward in one thing, well-developed in another—and in the other, quite superior. If at the same time that you were lagging in human wisdom you were not well-developed in Divine wisdom, it would be a detriment. But as you will become well-developed in the latter if you undertake things in a proper manner, then you will not suffer detriment, but rather, acquire superiority. This is because human wisdom cannot be compared with spiritual wisdom.

Speaking in this way, I do not want to say that it is forbidden to read anything else, but only that without anything else one can get by without detriment; whereas if one is inclined to other things, it is possible to suffer detriment in the most important area. If you pursue two different goals, you will not accomplish even one.

The question still remains unresolved as to whether one may read anything besides spiritual things. I would tell you with reservation, in a low voice: You may if you like, but just a little and not indiscriminately. Take this as a sign: When you are in a good mood spiritually and begin reading a book containing human wisdom, if the good mood begins to desert you, get rid of the book. This is a general rule for you.

Even books containing human wisdom may nourish the spirit. These are the books that indicate to us the vestiges of wisdom, benevolence, truth and solicitous Divine industry in nature and history. Read books such as these. God reveals Himself in nature and history in the same way as in His Word. Nature and history are Divine books for those who know how to read them.

You will say, "It is easy to tell me to read such books, but where do you get them?" This I cannot tell you. There are presently more books on scientific subjects coming out. Most of them, however, have a very bad direction; namely, they attempt to explain the origin of the world without God, and all moral-religious and other manifestations of the spiritual in our lives without the spirit and soul. Do not get those books. There are books on scientific subjects without such false wisdom. These you may read. It is good to understand the structure of plants and animals, especially man, and the laws of life as they are manifested in them. Great is the Divine wisdom in all of this! Unknowable! Ask the fellow who enjoys discussing religious subjects which books are of this sort.

What about stories and novels? There are good ones among these. To find out whether they are good, however, you must read them, and after you have finished, you will have acquired such tales and images that—God have mercy! You will soil your clean little mind. Afterward, go get cleaned up. Why would you want to bring such labor upon yourself? Therefore, I think it is better not to read them. When a benevolently-minded person who has read some story recommends it, you may read it.

There are good descriptions of geography. You may also read these. However, do a little of everything, and then only for variety. Keep up your spiritual work, and do not turn your attention away from it.

May the Lord bless you!

71.

ON COLDNESS IN PRAYER

On coldness in prayer. Careless and hurried prayer. How to flee this. The reading of prayers from memory.

May the grace of God be with you!

You write, "My prayer is somehow going poorly." That prayer is going poorly is not the fault of the prayer, but of the one who is praying. Try to pray as you should, and the prayer will go well. If someone writes carelessly, people reprimand and threaten him, and he begins writing meticulously. Reprimand yourself, if you will, and threaten yourself with Divine judgment, and you will begin praying properly. We conscientiously correct human affairs, because people would see and reproach us. We conduct the affairs of God haphazardly, however, because the Lord is silent and does not reproach us immediately, presenting His children, as many as are benefitted by Him, the opportunity to serve Him. Oh, how bitter it will be when we will have to plead guilty in this to the Lord Himself!

Where has your prayer gone? It was going well, you know, and you were already feeling its beneficial action in your heart. I will tell you where it has gone. You prayed once or twice diligently and with warmth, and received such quick help from St. Sergius as a consequence of your prayer, that you therefore thought your prayer was already established, and there was thus nothing more to worry about concerning it, that it would go along well on its own. By permitting this kind of thinking, you began reciting the prayers carelessly and hurriedly, and ceased guarding the thoughts. Because of this, your attention became dispersed, your thoughts were scattered in different directions and there was no prayer in the prayer. This happened a couple of times, and then prayer totally vanished. Acquire prayer from the beginning again, and ask for it from the Lord yourself.

You will learn from this that you must never consider any spiritual activity to be established, especially prayer; always go about it as if you were going to carry it out for the first time. First zeal is given to something that is done for the first time. If when undertaking prayer, you go about it as if you have never prayed properly yet, and only now do you want to do so for the first time, you will always carry out your prayer with first zeal. And it will go well.

I suppose you began carrying out your prayer rule hurriedly—and haphazardly—just so you would finish it. Make it a rule for yourself from now on, that you will never pray haphazardly. Nothing offends the Lord more than this. It is better to recite a few of the set prayers with the fear of God and reverence than to recite all of them haphazardly. It is better even to fall down on your knees and recite one of the prayers or even use your own words than to do the other thing. You began praying that other way, and there are no results. Scold yourself thoroughly for such carelessness. Know that no one who prays attentively and diligently ever departs from prayer without having received its action. Oh, what good we deprive ourselves of when we permit ourselves to pray carelessly!

How does haste come about in prayer? It is not clear. We spend hours on other tasks and it never seems long; but hardly have we begun our prayer than it seems we have been praying for who knows how long. We hurry ourselves along in order to finish sooner. There is no benefit from the prayer. What should be done, then? Some people do the following, so as not to be subject to this self-deception: They set aside a quarter of an hour for prayer, or half an hour, whatever is more convenient for them, and thus adjust their prayer time so that when the clock strikes, whether on the half hour or hour, they will know when it is time to end. While they are at prayer, they do not worry about reading a certain number of prayers, but only that they rise up to the Lord in a worthy manner for the entire set time. Others do this: Once they have established a prayer time for themselves, they find out how many times they can go around the prayer rope during that period, moving the beads in an unhurried manner. Then when they are at prayer, they move the beads unhurriedly for the set number of times, and during that period they pray to the Lord in their mind, speaking to Him in their own words or reciting set prayers, or bowing with reverence to His boundless majesty without either of those. There are others who get so accustomed to praying that the times they spend at prayer are moments of delight for them. It rarely happens that they stand at prayer for the set time only; instead, they double and triple it. Select whichever method pleases you best. Maintain it without fail. We cannot get along without a precise prayer rule for you. Those who are zealous about prayer do not need any rules.

I have already written you about memorizing the prayers and reciting them by heart when you are at prayer, without opening your prayer book. This is nothing to boast about! When you are at prayer, recite the prayer or psalm from memory, and embrace each word, not just with thought, but with feeling. If during this your own prayerful cries arise from some word of the psalm or prayer, do not cut them off, but let them come. You see, you will not worry about reciting a certain number of prayers, but only being at prayer for the allotted time, which will make itself known either by beads on the prayer rope or by the clock. Rush through the recitation of prayers and nothing will happen. Recite one psalm or one prayer for the whole time. Someone was saying that often he will recite a single prayer, the *Our Father*, for the entire allotted time. This is because he considers each word in the entire prayer. Another person said that when someone explained to him that one could pray in this way, he stood in reverential prayer for the entire Matins, reciting *Have mercy on me, O God*, and did not manage to complete the entire psalm.

Get accustomed to praying in this manner if you will, and, God granting, you will soon cultivate prayer within yourself. Then you will no longer need any rules. Labor, for nothing will come from you otherwise. If you are not successful in prayer, do not expect success in anything else. It is the root of everything.

May the Lord bless you.

72.

THE VOW OF RENUNCIATION OF THE WORLD

The vow of renunciation of the world. How to conduct oneself after pronouncing the vow until its fulfillment.

May the grace of God be with you.

Your last letter furnished me with unspeakable joy. So you made up your mind once and for all to dedicate your life to serving the Lord and to not have anything to do with worldly life. May God graciously accept this sacrifice and bless your good decision! You have spoken before the Lord; keep to it then, and from here on be so formed in your thoughts as to be already cut off from the world. You told me previously that you have a distaste for worldly life, both because of the weakness of your health, and because of your fear of such misfortunes as you have had occasion to observe in other families. But that was one conversation; this is now another. The matter is one and the same, but the spirit is completely different. First there was reluctance toward worldly life for worldly reasons, but now you are cutting yourself off from worldly life so that you may belong entirely to the Lord. Few people live without a family, but those who do live in the same way as those with families, with the very same cares and expectations. Your decision is not in this spirit. It is from an entirely different source, belongs to a different way of life and is preparing you for it. Kindle that very spirit in which you voiced your decision.

The decision has been pronounced, but now it is necessary to wait patiently as to when and how it will be carried out. It would be impossible to dash off suddenly in your situation, when everything, as you expect, would be against it. Parental blessing is the first condition. You must wait for it. Wait and pray. The Lord Who instilled such a good intention within you will carry it out Himself in an inconspicuous fashion, and then it will be downhill the rest of the way. "Speak" without talking, keeping in your soul one thought; pray wholeheartedly to the Lord that He carry out your intention, as His wise will knows.

At the same time, adapt to that kind of life within yourself, not by a change of outward ways, but of the inward order. By this I do not mean anything in particular other than that which we have previously written a lot about and that you have already begun. Set about everything that you have been told to do a little more decisively now. The foundation has been laid; construct the building.

You have turned your back on worldly things; do not turn your face toward them again.

Now you may completely refuse all amusements and stay more at home in solitude, engaged in some occupation, to include studies according to your frame of mind. Now you may act more decisively in this respect.

I would also remind you about the most important thing. When renouncing the world, it is necessary to become closer to God. You know this, but you will be blessed if you begin doing it. Think more about God and things of God. Fix in your mind the remembrance that God is everywhere, both outside you and within, and never be separated from this remembrance as you go about; work, sit, sleep and be awake with it. Join to this another remembrance, that of death, and that upon death, there will be the judgment and determination of eternal fate. These two remembrances are the two powerful guards of everything good. They themselves will teach you everything, kindling inside you the saving fear of God, the source of divine wisdom.

You already know all this. I am reminding you of everything in passing, so you will set about it a little more decisively. What you need to hear especially now is, Lord give the blessing! But await the fulfillment with patience.

73.

THE VOW OF CHASTITY

Continuation. Once a vow of chastity is given one must keep it steadfast. The heights of virginity.

I rush to add still more for you on the same subject.

St. Paul, who imparted the Christian faith in Corinth, fearing that the Corinthians were headed down the wrong path, wrote them, *For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste* *virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ* (2 Cor. 11:2-3). I have been jealous with godly jealousy over you since the beginning of our correspondence, as you see. This is what you will present to Christ the Lord—a chaste virgin, giving yourself to Him! But your betrothal to the Lord was not accomplished by me. It was arranged apart from my efforts or even my intentions. When writing to you, I had nothing in mind other than to set you on the way of the true Christian life, a reliable way in which, just as in a life boat, you would be able to sail the uncertain sea of this temporary existence. However, something more happened. Thank God for that! Your predisposition toward it came naturally; God gave it to you. God breathed His grace into it, and here is the decision!

The decision! It is, however, still far from the actual deed. How many things might be encountered by accident that could turn everything upside down. That is why it is impossible not to fear lest your mind be corrupted from naivete, and the enemy beguile you through his subtlety, as the snake did Eve so long ago. May the Lord deliver you from such circumstances. However, if it is always necessary for the servants of Christ to be sober and awake, vigilant and prayerful, it is even more necessary for you now with the intention you have. I can say nothing definite to you other than to be on guard. The enemy may attack at any moment. Write as soon as possible if that should happen, and in the meantime stand fast.

Implant a little more deeply the conviction that the way of life you have chosen is blessed by God. It was sanctioned by the Savior in the saying about eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake.[1] He gave it preference when he said of Mary, who had sat down by His feet and was listening only to what He said, that she had chosen the better part, that she had chosen the one thing needful.[1] You see clear examples of it in the person of many Prophets and Apostles, the Holy Forerunner of the Lord, and especially the Most Pure Lady Theotokos, the friend and source of purity. May Her motherly protection always be upon you. Virgins are the special object of Her protection.

---

[1] Matthew 19:12.

Female and male virgins were a fixture in Christ's Church even in apostolic times; they have been in the Church ever since and will continue to be in it, as long as there is a Church, that is, until the end of time. For this kind of life is not alien to our nature, and is favored by the spirit of belief in Christ. Many young women in Corinth did not want to get married, having fallen completely in love with Christ the Lord, the only husband to all. Their fathers turned to St. Paul, asking how they should act. St. Paul advised them to give their daughters freedom to work for the Lord and not oblige them to get married. The fathers listened to his advice, and the young women remained virgins.[2] The other churches followed the example of the Corinthians, and virginity blossomed everywhere. In other places, virgins gathered together to live in the same house; they worked for and prayed to God, not having anything to do with other people. Many of these virgins received the crown of martyrdom, as their lives attest.

You see what an assembly you are joining, in whose footsteps you are following, under whose protection you will be—and whose words you are heeding. See then, having put your hand to the plough, that you do not look back.[3] Learn by heart the words of the Apostle on renunciation of marriage, and bring them to mind frequently: *He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord... The*

---

[1] Luke 10:42.

[2] See Chapter 7 of I Corinthians.

[3] Luke 9:62.

unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in mind and spirit (I Cor. 7:32,34). There is nothing to say about the holiness of the body. But it is impossible not to say a lot about the holiness of the spirit, and not to take a lot of care concerning it. It is possible to lose it in an instant. *See then that you walk circumspectly* (Ephesians 5:15). How do you walk circumspectly? You guard the heart, so that it does not become attached to anything, not just to a person—nothing needs to be said about that—but not to any object at all. Any such attachment would be a violation of your betrothal to the Lord; it would be unfaithfulness to Him. For He is jealous, and He will exact severely from the hearts of those who are unfaithful.

I am not writing this to frighten you. How powerful fright is! But I do remind you that it may sometimes be necessary to admonish yourself with the fear of God, if you will understand in no other way. It is not possible to rely on our zeal and constancy. Here today, but tomorrow who knows what will be. You should know how bad it will be if you deviate from your intention.

May the Lord bless you!

74.

YEARNING FOR MONASTIC LIFE

An instruction for those who yearn for monastic life. Various aspects of the ascetic exploit of the celibate life. The patient waiting and preparation at home for monastic life.

May the grace of God be upon you!

You write, “Oh, if only it could be sooner! I would fly off now somewhere to the desert, so that I would see and hear nothing." No, no. It is quite impossible to rush. When there is haste and zeal like this to hurry things along, it is not of God. Confused desires are well-meaning, but they are not good and do not lead to the good. Godly things move along slowly and imperceptibly, but steadfastly.

Pray and wait with patience, looking to see whether a door will open. The Lord will arrange things in such a way as you cannot guess. You may become engaged to the Lord by yourself now, before Him Alone. As to when you will enter the chorus of His brides, let Him decide. Put yourself completely in His hands.

You are selecting a monastery. A monastery is not the only place for those who do not want to be bound by family ties. In the beginning there were no monasteries at all. Those who made up their minds to serve the Lord without being bound by everyday cares set up solitary cells for themselves within their homes and lived there, estranged from everything, fasting, praying and reading the Divine Scriptures. Then, after some time had passed and it became inconvenient to live in homes, some began leaving the cities and settling and living in natural caves, catacombs or cells that were constructed for that purpose. After that, monasteries were set up so people could live in a community and maintain themselves and carry on the activity of salvation in deliberate deeds through mutual efforts. Even as this was going on, there were others who decided to devote their lives to the Lord in an unmarried state but who did not enter monasteries, instead giving themselves to the service of their brothers and sisters in hospitals, poor-houses and hospices. None of these ways of life that came to be in the very beginning of Christ's Church have ceased, but have always existed and exist to this day. Even today unmarried people seek salvation at home, some go to monasteries, while others undertake to look after the sick as sisters of mercy.

You, too, may select any of these ways of life. As to which one precisely, you must wait and see which one God indicates. You were correct in saying that it is easier to find salvation in a monastery. There one may achieve purification of the heart sooner and that state which is joy in the Holy Spirit. Everything there is directed toward this. I think that because of the state of your health, a monastery would be the most suitable place for you. That is why you should not abandon the idea of entering one in due course. The Lord will indicate to you when. Until that time, you must be patient. Until then, follow the first way of life, that is, living at home. Have your own room; have it like a monastic cell, and conduct life there as if you were in a monastery. Let your father and mother be in place of the Mother Superior for you; your family in place of the sisters of the monastery; and you, a devoted novice for all.

You are hastening to a monastery as if to freedom and to Paradise. Indeed there is complete freedom for the spirit in a monastery, but not for the body or external activities. With regard to this, there is the absolute spiritual prohibition, which is immutable law, against having one's own will. You will indeed find Paradise there, but not always as if you are strolling down a flowery path. It may truly be found there, but it is obstructed by thorns and barbs through which you must go to reach it. No one achieves it without getting bruises and scratches. Keep these things in mind, and you will attain your hoped-for freedom and Paradise in the monastery.

Wait patiently, then. Remember the governess![1] She waited seven years, testing the firmness of her intention. She turned out to be a fervent nun because of this.

Why rush? The monasteries will not go away. You will have time to enter one someday. In the meantime, you should reinforce your intention and strengthen your body. You have devout ways at home. Your parents and relatives are God-fearing people. There is nothing that would be adverse to your decision that you cannot endure. Devote yourself to the Lord. Mature in this atmosphere and seed-plot.

---

[1] See Letter 28.

Thus, it has been decided: Wait. Adapt your life and your habits to those of the monastery.

Lord give the blessing!

75.

THE TRICKS OF THE ENEMY

The tricks of the enemy can dissuade one from the life of renunciation of the world. How to repel them.

May the Grace of God be with you!

You write, "I am sad. I cannot find peace anywhere. Something is burdening me; my heart was suddenly seized by heaviness and darkness."

The power of the Cross is with us! Take heart and stand fast. The enemy has guessed that you want to flee completely from that society around Christians where he conveniently profits, so he greets you with these difficulties and languor. You are not the only one; everyone experiences such attacks, but no one experiences them in the same way. You are tormented by difficulties; another person is overcome with fear; another person's thoughts are so full of obstacles that they are like mountains; another person's mind depicts the absurdity of some enterprise he has undertaken. He approaches each person in the way most suited to that person, directs torrents of thought, alarms the heart, disturbs him inwardly. This happens all at once, like the sudden rage of a storm. Such are indeed the ploys of our enemies. They are a disorderly bunch and lounge about everywhere. They see the doors are open and there are no guards; they burst into our home and turn everything upside down. They create a fuss and then they're gone. You are left to cope as you can. But, you see, there is still no harm from this. We are not guilty because our enemies attack; we are also not guilty of the disturbance of our inner state that they cause; we are also not guilty of those thoughts and feelings that are stirred up because of this. God, too, does not blame us. Just do not consent to anything that is not necessary. Suffer along, and all will pass.

You did not describe any characteristic of your languor, I suppose, because it is in fact not definite; more than anything else, this vagueness indicates that these are enemy attacks. Be steadfast! The Lord sent you this trial so that you could show that you were not joking when you made your vow. Treat your trial as something sent by the Lord, and say like Job, *Blessed be the name of the Lord!*[1] It was peaceful, and now there is difficulty! Thanks be to the Lord for peace, and thanks be for this difficulty. Tell the Lord, "I will endure if that is Thy will! Just help me to suffer, Lord." Throw yourself down before the Lord with your whole being. Call on the Mother of God.

You are suffering attack. This is an opportunity to show your ability to stand for the good, like a soldier; a chance to distinguish yourself when the enemy attacks. Let the enemy strike. You stand steadfastly for the good. You should even say this aloud, "I will not change my intention and decision one iota. I want nothing of what the enemy is suggesting." Name each thing he suggests one by one, renouncing and cursing it. Call on the Lord for help. Everything will pass. A layman was overcome by the spirit of abuse and disbelief. He related that, "I heard the enemy murmuring in my ears that there is no God, no Christ. But I just said over and over, 'I believe, Lord! I believe, believe, believe!' And I drove away the enemy." That is what you must do, too. Cry out, "I do not want this, that or the other thing; I want nothing suggested by the enemy. I want one thing, to speak solemnly before the Lord in my heart."

---

[1] *Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord* (Job 1:21).

You are saying, "I suppose I am a great sinner, and the Lord is punishing me." It is good that you feel yourself to be a sinner. And if you come to feel yourself to be a greater sinner, do not go too far with this feeling.

All of us are great sinners and irredeemable. If you will make out of your sinfulness an opportunity, there will be no misfortune. Just do not reverse your inner decisions, and do not fall into despair. No matter what the Lord sends, whether inwardly or outwardly, all is directed toward our cleansing and salvation. He Himself is close by and helps. He is close by you, too. Resurrect such hope and prayer while enduring.

The Lord sends this and things like it for the sake of crowns. He who stands his ground will win a crown. We, and those around us and those whom we encounter, are all capable of obtaining crowns. You just need attention and courage, so that you receive everything from God and attribute everything to Him.

Enjoy yourself peacefully, and do not tolerate any hesitations. Lord give the blessing!

76.

TEMPTATIONS FROM UNBELIEVERS

Temptations from unbelievers. A refutation of their vain wisdom and reasoning.

May the grace of God be upon you!

Well, now! No sooner did you manage to escape the first burden than another one, more subtle and more dangerous, was already waiting. Who is there with you who was carrying on so? Did he not tell you a bunch of stories and cram a lot of worthless garbage into your head? His aim was to make your faith waiver, and not only to divert you from Christ the Lord, but also to make you a total atheist. It was the enemy who sent you such a clever wise man.

You made the right decision; that is, to avoid in every way conversations with nonbelievers and any meetings with them. Evil conversations spoil the good attitude of the soul. Try to struggle and restore order afterward. But you know, you will not be saved from danger. These evil creatures stick their noses into everything. Look around, and there they are. In the future act in this way: When by chance you happen to overhear something that goes against your religious faith, try in every way not to let what you have heard into your heart, but let it go in one ear and out the other. At the same time, while drawing the attention away from the words of a nonbeliever, take care to occupy the heart with the conviction that our faith is indisputably true in all aspects, and if it has enemies, this is from a misunderstanding of the matter. It is possible to dispute everything, even whether we exist. The restored conviction in our heart, accompanied by thought about the narrow-mindedness and bad-heartedness of the speaker, will make your soul like a rock against which foolish words, when striking, will bounce off, leaving no traces.

If, in spite of this, something bad sinks into the soul, turn to prayer in the very same way that you did at St. Sergius Lavra: Appeal to your Guardian Angel, the Mother of God, and especially the Lord our Savior Himself, and they will disperse the gloom hanging over you. Afterward, either do your own examination of the bewilderment that befell you, or seek refutation of it in some book, or talk it over with someone; but without fail do something so that no trace of it is left in your soul. Any remaining trace would stir up the soul and be like stones cast at the feet of a pedestrian.

Write to me, too. You did well to write everything you heard. Although you did not waiver and have recovered from everything that lodged in your thought from this conversation, I would say, however, another word or two to counter it.

"Religious faith is instilled through education." It does not instill it, but develops it and gives it a definite form. Every newborn enters into a society that has faith. The faith of society becomes his faith, as with other things. An aptitude for faith, however, and its requirement for the soul, are not instilled by society. It is the same with respect to knowledge. Society, through education, transmits the knowledge it has accumulated to its new member, but does not give him the aptitude for knowledge. This aptitude is an inherent property of the mind.

Likewise, faith in the existence of God and His almightiness is an inherent property of the spirit, which is found with vitality in each person as soon as his aptitudes are developed. Society transmits only the way of its faith, but not the power of belief itself or aptitude for it.

Society instills faith through education. But just how did belief come into society? Everything that goes into society comes from the mind. Society is the repository, like a reservoir, into which everything that comes from the mind flows. It is in this way that there is faith in society, because it is first of all in the mind. It went out from the mind and settled in society. Faith is older than society and the family, and, consequently, older than education. Education gives back to the newborn that which was previously introduced into the family and society from the mind.

Therefore, establish, if you will, a little more firmly the conviction in your mind that education develops only what is in human nature, but adds nothing new to it. If it develops faith, that is because it is in human nature. No one would be able to teach you to know God and to worship Him if this were not in the human spirit on account of some unassailable law. Here we see that there is religious belief in every race of man. The most primitive men have it, because without it, man is not man. If some well-educated men do not believe, this does not mean they have made great strides forward or have achieved great heights; instead, it means that they have departed from human nature; they have distorted and mutilated themselves like someone who puts out his own eyes or cuts off his nose. If everyone has faith, it follows that the norm of human life undeniably includes faith. Consequently, he who does not have faith departs from this norm, and is a moral freak. All nonbelievers are of this order.

"A man fell among the wild beasts since childhood, and now he does things the same way they do." This was discussed in French narratives and novels at the end of the last century.[1] Whether this happened in reality I do not know. Man is man everywhere. Let him grow up among animals, and he will take after them without fail. But let it happen as they were saying: Take this man who grew up among the animals, take a couple of these animals, and place them in your own society. After a week you would see how much the man differs from the animals. Why is this? Because there is the embryo of higher life in him. His faith will also emerge; it is within him already, but it is vague and obscured. It will awaken and soon come to full power beginning from the first indications. The animals, however, will remain animals.

---

[1] There were several celebrated cases of children who were allegedly raised by wild animals in eighteenth century Europe. Here, St. Theophan is probably referring to that of Victor, a boy of about eleven years who was found in the Caune Woods in France in 1799. Dr. Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard studied Victor and tried to enculturate him, with limited success. Itard wrote about his experiences in *The Wild Boy of Aveyron*, which has been translated into English by George and Muriel Humphrey (New York: Century, 1932).

Nonbelievers who have departed from the norm of human nature usually turn to abnormalities in confirming their skepticism. So do they point to congenital idiots, besides the alleged cases of man being raised by animals. What kinds of slander do they not make up in all this! There is no God and no soul. At the same time, to be fair, it is not proper to draw any conclusions from these cases, because they have still not been explained. Think of congenital idiots in this way, if you will. They have a soul as well as all people, but it does not have the opportunity to manifest itself completely; it is bound. Apply this then to certain actions of Divine Economy. It happens that someone would be threatened by danger from a combination of circumstances, if he were to become involved in them. God sends him an illness, and while he is lying in bed, the circumstances pass without his getting involved. Thus is he saved from misfortune. If he had been healthy, he certainly would have become entangled in matters, and would have fallen into misfortune. This is how you should think concerning congenital idiots: Their souls are bound for the entire period of their earthly existence, because if they were to be unbound, they would cause misfortune for others and for themselves. In the other life it will be revealed that this is so. Their souls will be transferred there like the souls of babies who have died. We will see whether such a belief turns out to be true or not in that world. But the controversy over this circumstance will be settled in that world, if it may be settled. It is not possible to come to any sort of conclusion concerning it in this world.

I will not touch upon the other absurdities you heard. You understood them well yourself. *See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise* (Eph. 5:15).

May the Lord bless you!

77.

OBEDIENCE TO PARENTS

Temptations due to domestic unpleasantness. Obedience to parents as a preparation for monastic obedience.

May the grace of God be with you!

What next! The enemy wanted to make you a nonbeliever; now he is making you a rebel, and against whom? Against your parents.

My God, do you whine in your letter! What could have happened? Most likely you were stung by a flea. I would guess that in all probability it is some trifle, and there is nothing to be said about it. But in your head it grew into such a big thing that you could not see it all at once. It is all the enemy's doing. He is driving you from your parents' home in order to muddle your brain. In this way he swells every trifle into a mountain that overwhelms you. You cannot describe what it is. I would tell you up front that there is nothing to describe. The enemy is up to his usual trick of confusing our mind with uncertainty. He knows how to cover the griefs he causes and his foolish comforts with illusions so that people, not seeing anything definite in them, nonetheless think they are something great. Once one begins analyzing it, everything shatters; there is neither grief nor comfort where there once seemed to be mountains. All is deception. And now he has arranged to cover you with deception. Cross yourself, if you will, and spit on these counsels of the enemy.

Troubles, troubles! I am certain they do not exist at all. But suppose they do indeed exist; is it really necessary to run from them? One must bear them with good cheer and thankfulness to the Lord. It is the enemy, you see, who is rousing you. When a soldier encounters the enemy, is it necessary for him to run away? It is necessary to fight. You, too, must fight. What were you about to do? The enemy, raising some troubles, merely showed his horns, and here you are, ready to run. You are not thinking. After making the decision to not get married, you have only two ways to leave your parents' home: Either you go to a monastery or to the sisters of mercy, one or the other, with the blessing of your parents themselves. Until one thing or the other has come about, stay at home and endure everything. Stand before the Lord at this very moment, if you will, sincerely repenting your evil confusion, and utter the firm decision, "I will wait, I will bear everything with good cheer. Thy will be done in everything, Lord!"

I am unable to understand how you could disagree in something with your parents. If it concerns judgment in something, why don't you yield in it each time with humility? They are older than you and more experienced. You must admit that you are more likely to make a mistake in judgment than they are. Assume that you probably understand poorly, and agree with their opinion. If it concerns the way something is done about the house, again do it their way, and that will be the end of it. If you cannot do something, explain that you cannot, and that will also be the end of it. If in spite of that they insist that you do it, do what you can. I cannot conceive of any disagreement you could have in anything that you could not cope with. The enemy makes a mountain out of a molehill in everything.

Do you want everything to go as you desire? Proud woman! Not only is this wrong with respect to something around the house, but even with respect to you yourself. Give yourself up in total obedience to your parents and do everything to please them and put their minds at rest. This will be preliminary preparation for future monastic obedience or diligence in a community of sisters of mercy. Thus did St. Paul lay down the law for everyone: *Submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God* (Eph. 5:21). You, however, undertake to contradict your parents without fearing God. Where did this come from? In which school did you learn such wisdom?

I repeat to you once again, *See then that you walk circumspectly*! May the Lord bless you!

78.

INJUSTICE AND FALSE ACCUSATION

Temptations due to the injustices and false accusations of other people. The patient endurance of these. A warning to those who desire to leave their parents' house for freedom.

May the grace of God be with you!

Again?! Injustices, wrongful accusations! It is probably from somewhere outside. No matter where it is from, I would say to you, do not just be courageous and stand fast, but rejoice. It means that things with your soul are going well. The Lord is leading you to cleansing, and the enemy is encountering strong opposition within you. Stand your ground firmly. There is no need to be troubled by injustices and wrongful accusations. He who causes them will be judged by God, and he who suffers them must bear them with good cheer and give thanks to God. Do not forget that there is another life in which everything here will be answered for, in praise or in remorse. What if you endure injustice? There will be praise. If you do not? Remorse. Do not say, "That is not right." Whether something is right or not is not your business to judge, it will be said. Why did you not bear it?

Injustices do not come from God, but are permitted by God for the good of the person to whom they are permitted. Truly for the good! These are not just words, but a real thing. I cite for you the example of the martyrs, who were tormented in every way possible. And where was the Lord? He was there indeed, and appeared to them, comforted them, lessened their suffering, but all the same left them to bear their torments to the end, so as to receive the full crown. Similarly, each falsehood and wrongful accusation prepares a crown. But the person to whom they befall must endure them. Now you have encountered this necessity. Endure them with good cheer, if you will, as if they did not exist. God wants this from you for your own benefit.

You say it is terrible to give yourself over to falsehoods for an entire lifetime. Of course it is terrible. That is why it is said of those who follow the Lord, Be thou strong and of good courage![1] Ahead of you is a cross. It appears that nothing more remains other than to give yourself over to sorrows, privations and wrongful accusations. This self-denial, I would say to you, is the *beginning of the true path.* Give yourself over to that! The very moment you deny yourself, you begin following the Lord. Think over all this and decide, if you will, in a Godly manner. All success is from the necessary resolution of this point.

You would flee your parents' house, but where to you still do not know. Apparently you feel some sort of constraint from them. Your parents' duty is to guard you, and they cherish you,

---

[1] See Deuteronomy 31:6 and numerous other places in the Old Testament as well as I Corinthians 16:13 in the New Testament.

I think, as the apple of their eye. If this goes against your desires in some way, you must resign yourself. It is not right to see this as their desire set against yours, but more natural to see here the desire to protect you and keep you safe from everything. This is the fruit of love. You may sweeten the bitterness of obedience with the certainty of this, if you feel that way on account of your disobedience.

You must pay back for what you receive in your family with this obedience. Food, clothing, shelter, while not insignificant, are not the most important things. The most important thing is security from outside troubles. You are protected by the wings of an eagle. The eagle's beak and talons are ready to defeat anyone who would attempt to cause you harm or trouble. This blessing is irreplaceable. Without the eagle to protect you, you would be pecked to death. No one is attacking now, but everyone would pounce on you later. You cannot imagine how terrible it is to be defenseless, because you have not experienced it. May God grant that you never experience it. Do you have protection? Keep it, and do not give it up. From the safety of your home you must find safety elsewhere, either within the walls of a monastery or inside the community of the sisters of mercy. Do not undertake the struggle alone! You would be pecked to death, and would not find your place.

What does such a strongly expressed impulse toward freedom for you mean? This evil impulse is of evil. Your path is already defined. Where is there to break away to? Did you not specify what you wanted, by so desiring freedom for yourself? There is no reason to seek inner freedom, because it already exists, since it is an integral part of the soul. No one can take it away. It appears that you find external freedom desirable. But consider, if you will, to what extent such freedom would be permissible and attainable. No matter where you would turn, you would be surrounded everywhere by the same sort of freedoms as yours, all equal to your freedom. No matter what we intended to do, we would always have to weigh the pros and cons of our actions with those of other people, and be restricted by them, and, consequently, they would hinder our freedom. No matter what step you would take, there would be interference with freedom, and a reasonable one, too, which, you have to admit, you could not object to. If this is what it is like, then the impulse to freedom is like chasing a rainbow, or even worse, desiring to catch shadows. Thus, in general, it is a thousand times unthinkable for you.

Curb your impulses, if you will. Children listen to their parents and their advice and then arrange their own affairs and lives, obeying them voluntarily. That is the law of freedom for you! But what are you thinking of doing? "I will run off here or there, and no one will dare to tell me where to go." You are a real emancipationist! Just look at yourself, are you not afflicted with pride? All emancipationists are proud women.

What is wise about dashing off somewhere? We constantly see such people; we just do not see happy ones among them. What sense could there be in such impulses? None, just fanfare; step aside! "I want this or that! Who tells me what to do?" These lawless people rush along without turning their heads back or looking under foot, while they are throwing themselves into the abyss from which there is no way out. Keep this in mind, if you will, when you are feeling such impulses as "I will do this, I will decide on that."

One of your intentions is very good. Perhaps it could be an indication of what to do with your life? I understand it to be to enter the sisters of mercy. But because it is observed among such disorderly impulses, it is not good. There are still no indications as to what you should do. Wait, as I have already written you several times. The Lord will arrange everything.

You have a cozy home. Stay there until the time comes to leave.

May the Lord bless you!

79.

FINAL ANXIETIES AND DISTURBANCES

Final anxieties and disturbances. Entrusting one's welfare into God's hands with prayer and courage against the enemy who brings temptations upon us.

May the grace of God be with you!

You still have anxieties. Tell me, where could they have come from? Everything external is in order for you; you have reexamined and adjusted everything internally, and have confirmed your decision. Where could these anxieties come from, then? Everything is from the enemy, everything. From nowhere else.

What else could it be?! Are you not thinking of arranging your life on your own, through your own efforts and abilities, as if that was what you were told?! Take a look, and if this is indeed the case, rush to correct it. With this attitude you will not get rid of your confusion. So there you are. Reexamine yourself, if you please, or mentally repeat everything you were told to do and what has occurred in you, and how you, at last, resolved the matter of your own life; and direct this reexamination in such a way that the end results in a firm decision to place your fate irrevocably in the hands of God. Then begin praying, and after praying fervently, speak before the Lord from your heart, "I place my fate in Thy hands, Lord. In the way Thou knowest, arrange my life, with all its contingencies and happenstances. From now on I cut off every care about myself, having but one care, to always do what is pleasing before Thee." Speak in this way, and by the very action you will have already placed yourself completely in God's hands, not concerned about anything, but calmly accepting every sort of situation, as being arranged for you on purpose by God, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant. Your sole concern should be to act according to God's commandment in every instance. This is all that is required for you.

As soon as you have arranged things in this way, there will be an end to all your worries. You are concerned about yourself at present, and want to arrange and turn all happenstances toward your own end. Since it is not all working out, you are troubled that this is not like this, and that is not like that. When, however, you commit everything to the Lord and accept it as coming from Him and as needed by you for your good, then you will have no troubles, but will only have to look around you to see what the Lord sends, so you may act in accordance with what is sent. Any situation may come under the commandment. Place it under, and act according to, the commandment, trying to please God instead of exerting yourself to satisfy your own desire. Try to understand well what I am saying, and resolve to achieve this state of mind. It is necessary to learn it; it cannot be done suddenly. Pray about this.

I pray to the Lord that He will deliver you from that situation which you consider unpleasant for yourself, adding, however, if that is in accordance with His holy will and necessary for your salvation. He will deliver you, in His own time, of course. Clothe yourself with faith and be patient. Simply looking at current conditions, we see that they continually change. Nothing stays the same. Even that which burdens you will change. There will come the day when you will breathe freely, and not only breathe, but flutter about like a butterfly among the flowers; you only have to endure the allotted term with patience. The housewife places a pie in the oven and does not take it out until she is certain that it is baked. The Master of the world has placed you in an oven and is keeping you there, waiting until you are baked. Be patient, then, and wait. As soon as you are ready, you will not have to sit another minute in the oven. You will be taken out immediately. If you rush out of there on your own, you will be like a half-baked pie. Arm yourself with patience. I would also say to you that by our faith, he who endures the troubles he encounters with good cheer, accepting them as being from the hand of the Lord, is a partaker of martyrdom. Imprint this well in your thought, if you will, and draw comfort from it for your heart.

It is impossible to live without emotions, but it is not proper to yield to them. It is necessary to refresh and moderate them through reason, and give them a proper direction. You are impressionable, and your heart spills over into your head. Do as I have already written to you: Think out ahead of time where the possible stimulus for each emotion is and enter into situations keeping yourself on the lookout for disturbances of the heart, or keeping your heart in steady hands. You must practice this, and through practice it is possible to gain full control over yourself.

But everything comes from God. It is necessary to turn to Him. You write, however, that you do not pray. Clever girl! Have you become an atheist or something? What do you mean, you do not pray? You do not recite all the set prayers, but you tell God in your own words what is on your mind, and you ask for help. "See, Lord, what is happening with me? This thing and that. I cannot cope with myself. Help, All-Merciful One!" Tell every little part of your need, and ask personal help for everything. This will be the most genuine prayer. You may always pray with your own prayer, without reading the prayers in the book; just as long as you do not indulge yourself in laziness.

Why do you listen to the person who suggests that you give up prayer? Or do you not see that this is the enemy? Obviously it is. He murmurs in your ear, "Give it up," and sometimes, after seizing your entire body, he drags you quickly off to bed. These are all his tricks. But he is going about his business, distracting you from your good work. We, however, must go about our business, not abandoning our good work until we are finished. Thus, be armed with courage, if you please, and do not listen to the enemy, and do not pay any attention to his murmuring. It is even better to get angry. Anger at the enemy is the same thing as striking someone in the chest. He will fly off immediately.

I wish with all my heart for you to find peace at last.

Lord give the blessing!

80.

REST AFTER A STORM

Rest after a storm of temptations raised up by the adversary. Preparation to go home. Final counsel.

May the grace of God be with you!

Well, glory be to God! Through prayer, you have begun to defy your anxieties, or better, to defy the enemy who caused them, and peace has come to you. May the Lord help you to continue such activity.

So you see what a storm you have endured! The words of the Lord have been fulfilled in you: *Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.*[1] Where did he not toss you?! The Lord allowed it, and he sifted you, first tossing you one way, then the other. What a grace of God that at last you were delivered! You are learning. The science of life is acquired through experience. Remember well what it was like for you during the entire course of this terrible condition, and you will understand it more precisely. All this time you were under attacks of the enemy. You know now what these attacks are like, how they appear and how they depart. Henceforth you will know when you are undergoing an enemy attack. The enemy always masks himself with the illusion of righteousness. Do not look at that, however, but at what is going on inside the soul; that is, the continual anxiety and vague uncertainty. In this way you may guess immediately that the enemy has come; drive him away with harsh admonishments and through prayer. Godly influences, however, are always light-bearing. Your Guardian Angel has put a word of comfort in your ear concerning this. Get accustomed to listening to him, and he will teach you everything.

---

[1] Luke 22:31.

I am very glad that you have set out on your path. Labor over yourself, if you will, preparing yourself for what you intended. The enemy is compelling you to hurry. He always alarms us so as to confuse matters. Godly things, however, are peaceful and quiet. It is impossible except with waiting. Everything in its own time. The time will come when it will be downhill the rest of the way, as I have already written.

You intend to move to the village and are dreaming about the pleasures of village life. Good, good! That life has truth. In cities, especially in capital cities, there is no truth. There, everyone is playing a comedy. May God grant you to reach that place where you quietly grew up and were educated as soon as possible, and safely. How will you remember your sojourn in the ancient capital? It afforded you all kinds of useful learning; especially at the end it duly scorched you in the frying pan.

You will be an anchoress in the village. I will add something of my own to your dreams. Find a natural cave, or dig one out with your own hands. On one side, if possible, let there be a small fountain; on the other side, some sort of fruit tree; in front, a small garden. Train a few songbirds for the tree and flowers. Arise early, and, secluding yourself here, sing together with the birds to the glory of the One Who created all!

May the Lord bless your path!

⁂

Oval portrait of St. Theophan from
Russky Palomnik (*Russian Pilgrim*), 1894.

THE SAINT THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE SOCIETY OF AMERICA

FOUNDED ON ST. PHILIP THE DEACON DAY,
OCTOBER 11/24, 1992,
AT ST. PAISIUS ABBEY, FORESTVILLE, CALIFORNIA

It is important for us 20th Century American lovers of Truth to be "plugged into" the Orthodox Tradition—not only the texts of Orthodoxy, but the context in which the Holy Fathers lived and do live even now. To bring this context to the contemporary "pepsi generation" is to follow in the spirit of St. Theophan who labored so that the average person could understand what spiritual life is all about. This is how he preached the Gospel "to the poor": he made spiritual life accessible to everyone regardless of education or background. St. Tikhon of Zadonsk in an earlier generation had also labored for this cause. In fact, it was he that St. Theophan consciously sought to emulate in his apostolic work.

Another attempt of this kind in pre-revolutionary Russia was carried out by Nikon of Vologda. He went to the tomb of St. Sergius of Radonezh and wept over the saint's relics, seeking an understanding of what to do. There he was inspired to write the *Trinity Leaflets,* a simple four-fold leaflet which came out weekly. Inside were short homilies and talks that delivered a very simple but powerful message to the spiritually impoverished common man. The *Trinity Leaflets* became so popular that they were printed by the millions and distributed throughout the Empire. This same Nikon, after once again weeping at St. Sergius' tomb, began to publish a larger weekly, *Trinity Word.* Helen Kontzevitch, the wife of the well-known theologian Ivan Kontzevitch and accomplished author and theologian in her own right, considered it the best periodical ever published in Russia.

Desiring to follow in the footsteps of these recent Holy Fathers, a small group of American Orthodox converts founded *The Saint Theophan The Recluse Society Of America* late in 1992 "for the promotion of true Orthodox Enlightenment in the English-speaking world." Like St. Theophan, we hope to present people with Orthodox Tradition in its fullness, yet in a form which is accessible, and thereby to ignite many souls with zeal for the Lord. Working to accomplish this end, the Society encourages the creation of small groups (local brotherhoods or fellowships) dedicated to studying and practicing Christian spiritual life as taught and understood by St. Theophan, taking his writings (and similar literature by other Holy Fathers) as a sure guide to Christian life in our own times. In addition, the Society has undertaken the publication of important spiritual literature in the English language for distribution throughout the English-speaking world via leaflets, pamphlets and monographs, and via its bulletin: *The Path of Salvation,* named after one of the saint's major works.

There are three types of literature related to St. Theophan available for such study: 1. literature about him (biographies and memoirs); 2. literature by him (of which there are two categories—original writings by him and the writings of others which were edited and revised by him); 3. writings similar in nature to his that reveal to us the context in which he lived and wrote.

Several good, full biographies exist in Russian, but none in English. To help fill this need, the Society has begun the serialization of the saint's biography written by Fr. Nicholas Deputatov in its Bulletin. Installments appear as they are translated from the original Russian.

Catalogues of the saint's own works show that he was truly a prolific writer. Not only did he write commentaries upon all the Pauline letters (with the exception of Hebrews) and works on theological subjects, but he carried on a voluminous correspondence during his years of reclusion at Vysha. In addition to these works of original composition, he labored as a translator and editor of other important spiritual texts. Among these are a Russian edition of the *Philokalia* and the well known classic, *Unseen Warfare,* both of which he not only translated, but also reedited to include additional material that would be profitable for the edification of Orthodox readers of his (and our) time.

As to literary writings which are similar in spirit to St. Theophan, there are many. The works of St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, St. John of Kronstadt and St. Tikhon of Zadonsk are all good examples.

In addition to the Society Bulletin, a packet, *How to Begin a St. Theophan the Recluse Study Group,* has been created and is available upon request. A modest contribution is requested for either of these publications—single copies are $2 each. Annual dues in the Society are $10 which includes the cost of receiving the Bulletin. To apply for membership and/or subscribe to *The Path of Salvation,* to request the Study Group Packet or additional copies of the Bulletin, please write:

The Saint Theophan the Recluse Society
c/o Fr. Philip Tolbert
7761 Martinelli Road
Forestville, CA 95436

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 9999 02963 725 1

WITHDRAWN
No longer the
Bos
Sale of t

spirituallife00feof
spirituallife00feof
spirituallife00feof

RELIGION $12.95

“*The SPIRITUAL LIFE* is such a realm into which the wisdom of this world cannot penetrate.”

—ST. THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Once, in the middle of the dance floor at some annual ball, a young lady had a sudden glimpse of the immortality of her soul, and as this vision flashed upon her inward eye, she was struck with the thought that all this swirling around the dance floor was utterly futile. Amazed and disturbed, she wrote to the recluse: “Is this normal, or is it a morbid hindrance to a desire for a happy life in the world?” The answer to her question evoked a correspondence which resulted in this volume.

St. Theophan strove to make sure that the young soul of his correspondent would not only be familiar with the principles of spiritual life, but would first of all be able to keenly hear the right “tone” of spiritual life. He attuned her soul to that tone, like an instrument to a pitch, in a way natural to her personality. He helped her first of all hear the movement of her spirit, and only then, using the instrument of her soul, did he help her to hearken to the Spirit of God which “bloweth where it listeth” (John 3:8).

This tuning of the soul is necessary so that the soul will be in harmony with the voice of God’s Providence echoing in the instrument of the heart. Therefore, this book can be rightly called a primer to be used before embarking into the realm of spiritual life.

ST. HERMAN OF ALASKA BROTHERHOOD
St. Paisius Abbey
ISBN 0-938635-36-0